Travel and Exploration

The history of travel writing dates back to the Bible, Caesar, the Vikings and the Crusaders, and its many themes include war, trade, science and recreation. Explorers from Columbus to Cook charted lands not previously visited by Western travellers, and were followed by merchants, missionaries, and colonists, who wrote accounts of their experiences. The development of steam power in the nineteenth century provided opportunities for increasing numbers of ‘ordinary’ people to travel further, more economically, and more safely, and resulted in great enthusiasm for travel writing among the reading public. Works included in this series range from first-hand descriptions of previously unrecorded places, to literary accounts of the strange habits of foreigners, to examples of the burgeoning numbers of guidebooks produced to satisfy the needs of a new kind of traveller - the tourist.

Narrative of a Journey in the Interior of China, and of a Voyage to and from that Country in the Years 1816 and 1817

Clarke Abel (c.1780–1825) was Chief Medical Officer accompanying Lord Amherst’s unsuccessful diplomatic embassy to China in 1816. Encouraged by Sir Joseph Banks, he acted as official naturalist to the expedition, which penetrated further into China than had been possible for previous western visitors. Although most of his large collection of botanical and mineralogical specimens was lost during the return voyage, survivals included several new species, some of which were named after him. This work, published in 1818, made Abel’s reputation, and he was elected to the Royal Society the following year. His geological survey of the Cape of Good Hope, studied on the outward journey, is particularly impressive. Abel’s account of Chinese society and culture is an important record of a country which was then largely inaccessible to Europeans. An appendix by Robert Brown (Banks’ botanist) lists the specimens that survived the shipwreck, which is itself dramatically described.
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Narrative of a Journey in the Interior of China, and of a Voyage to and from that Country in the Years 1816 and 1817

Clarke Abel
NARRATIVE OF A JOURNEY

IN THE INTERIOR OF

CHINA,

AND OF

A VOYAGE TO AND FROM THAT COUNTRY,

IN THE YEARS 1816 AND 1817;

CONTAINING

AN ACCOUNT OF THE MOST INTERESTING TRANSACTIONS

OF

LORD AMHERST'S EMBASSY TO THE COURT OF PEKIN,

AND

OBSERVATIONS ON THE COUNTRIES WHICH IT VISITED.

By CLARKE ABEL, F.L.S.

AND MEMBER OF THE GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY,
CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER AND NATURALIST TO THE EMBASSY.

ILLUSTRATED BY MAPS AND OTHER ENGRAVINGS.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR LONGMAN, HURST, REES, ORME, AND BROWN,
Paternoster-row.
1818.
TO THE

RIGHT HONOURABLE

LORD AMHERST,

&c. &c. &c.

MY LORD,

The high situation held by Your Lordship as head of the Embassy of which these pages contain some account, will, in the public mind, point out the propriety of the present Dedication. Permit me to declare that this consideration has less influenced me than the desire of publicly thanking Your Lordship for your sanction and support to my scientific pursuits, and uniform kindness to myself.

I am, My Lord,

With the greatest respect,

Your Lordship's

Obliged and obedient humble Servant,

CLARKE ABEL.

London, July, 1818.
ERRATA.

Page 10. line 15. for Sensations never, read Sensations which I never.
34. line 6. for below quite bare, read below they are quite bare.
35. note, for See note (E) in Appendix, read See Appendix.
50. line 15. for eight or ten, read eighty or a hundred.
52. note, for Appendix C, read Appendix.
60. line 31. for a fern which I believe to be the Polypodium trichotomum of Kämpfer, read from the Polypodium dichotomum of Thouars.
60. note, for Lious Kämpferi, read Kämpferi. 44. note, for Flora Appendix. Pt. 17.
61. line 53. for Polypodium trichotomen, read Polypodium dichotomum.
63. note, for See Exhibit I, in Appendix E, read See Appendix.
68. note, for See Appendix F, read See Appendix.
108. line 8. for Chow-te-jin, read Sun-te-jin.
145. line 10. for coryphiolum, read coryphiolum.
150. line 7. for over, read thorough.
153. line 9. for white, read black.
155. lines 3. & 5. for Palestine, read Bithynia.
160. line 14. for drying, read drying.
162. line 91. for Chinese, roman and.
167. line 10. for Immaculanus, read Immaculatus.
181. line 25. for smallest, read smallest least.
191. line 24. for format, read latter.
203. line 17. for vegetable, read corn.
204. line 6. for except, read except it.
244. lines 9. & 13. for Augustine, read Franciscan.
254. line 34. for suit, read suite.
257. line 10. for payed, read paid.
315. line 97. for religions, read religious.
322. note, in the measurement of the orang-outang, for 9, read 19, as the circumference of its hips.
PREFACE.

I have laboured under great difficulties and many discouragements in preparing the following pages for the press. A narrative, having for its principal subject a journey through the interior of China, must derive its interest either from the novelty and importance of the incidents which it relates, or from the quantity of original information which it contains respecting that singular country. In both these respects I am in a great degree anticipated. The tale of the Transactions of Lord Amherst's Embassy has been too well and too circumstantially told by an official pen to leave me much expectation of finding public curiosity unsatisfied respecting them. The close delineation of that part of the country equally visited by Lord Macartney's and Lord Amherst's Embassy, contained in the accurate and laboured work of the late Sir George Staunton, has left very little to tell respecting it, and the production just alluded to has in a great measure described what was exclusively seen by the latter. The work that had for its object the establishing "the point of rank which China may be considered to hold in the scale of nations," has so exhausted the topics which in this view might be dwelt upon, and has so illustrated them by the writings of the Missionaries, as almost to preclude the hope of a further elucidation of the same subjects from similar sources of information.
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I am in scarcely less difficulty respecting the natural history of the countries which I have visited. Sickness abridged, and shipwreck almost annihilated the materials which would have afforded extensive scientific communication respecting China. My illness, indeed, was comparatively of little importance, except as it prevented my observ-ation of the country; for the exertions of my friends more than compensated the loss of my individual efforts in making collections. But the shipwreck deprived me of all the fruits of those means which the wisdom and liberality of the East India Company placed at my command; and has only left me the duty of stating, in justice to others, what was the nature of those means, and something of the results to which they led.

My appointment to the Embassy was at first simply medical; but through the recommendation of Sir Joseph Banks to the East India Company, I was permitted to take upon me the office of Naturalist, and received an ample outfit of all the apparatus for scientific research. To give greater effect to my exertions in collecting and preserving the vegetable productions of the countries to be visited by the Embassy, a botanic gardener, from the Royal gardens at Kew, taking out with him a plant cabin, for the preservation of living specimens, was placed under my directions; and to assist generally in my pursuits my brother-in-law, Mr. Poole, was allowed to attend me. With such facilities, it would have been strange, even in countries often trod by scientific men, if I had not gleaned some new and important facts. But in China, scarcely touched by the foot of the naturalist, nothing short of a rich harvest could have been received as a token of my due exertions. The proofs of what these were, of their efficiency or abortiveness, are buried in the straights of Gaspar. But it is incumbent on me to bear testimony to the exertions of Mr. Hooper, the Botanic Gardener, whose industry was equally unremitting and availing. His more peculiar department having been to collect and preserve seeds, he placed, on our leaving China, three hundred packages,
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in my keeping, many of which were taken from plants of undescribed genera, and by far the greater number from unknown species. They formed part of the shipwrecked collection.*

From the kindness of Sir George Staunton, to whom I gave a small collection of China plants, and of Captain Basil Hall, to whom I gave a small collection of China rocks at Canton, I have derived all the specimens which have enabled me to give the slight geological and botanical notices of China contained in this work. To the latter gentleman, and to his friend, Mr. Clifford, I am also under other obligations of an important kind; and in naming them, have to mention the loss of collections equalling my own in value. In taking leave of the Embassy on its disembarkation in the Gulf of Pe-tche-le, they took charge of a case of bottles with spirit, for the purpose of preserving any interesting marine animal production which might fall in their way; and the necessary means for the preservation of plants. On rejoining the Embassy five months afterwards, they presented me with a collection of Zoophytes and an extensive collection of plants from the Lew-chew Islands. These also perished with the Alcestes, but do not complete my catalogue of losses. A fine collection of madrepores made by Capt. Maxwell may be added to them, and will still leave it unfinished. Whilst the Alcestes and Lyra explored the Corean coast and the Lew-chew islands, the other ships of the Embassy visited the coast of Tartary. Lieut. Maughn, of the East India Company’s service, went with them, and having taken directions as to the mode of preserving dried specimens of plants, surprised me on my arrival at Canton with an extensive geological and botanical collection from the coast of Tartary. These, encreased by a collection which had been made from the same part of the world, for Mr. Livingston, one of the surgeons to the British factory at Canton, and which I received from the kindness of that gentle-

* After leaving the wreck of the Alcestes, I had the mortification of hearing that the cases containing these seeds had been brought upon deck and emptied of their contents by one of the seamen, to make room for some of the linen of one of the gentlemen of the Embassy.
PREFACE.

man, were also placed in my possession, and shared the fate of my other specimens. But I should fatigue the patience of my readers without doing justice to my own feelings, if I attempted to state all that I owe to the kindness and exertions of my friends and all that they have left me to regret.

After these declarations respecting the loss of materials which would have given value and interest to these pages, what, it may fairly be asked, have I remaining of importance to the public? In looking over my observations on the countries that I had visited, I was of opinion that they contained something to interest, and something to inform. It is not for me to judge how far I may have correctly estimated the value of my matter; but I trust that the exclamation of the Poet,

"——— ibi omnis,
  Effusus labor."

will not entirely apply to my pages. I have endeavoured to describe things as I saw them; and when subjects arose incidentally from my narrative, have tried to give them an extrinsic interest by noticing the opinions of others and comparing them with my own. In doing so, I have respected the freedom of my own mind, and have never hesitated to express my thoughts, even when they differed from high authority. I trust that my language has, on these occasions, expressed the deference of my feeling. If, however, it should not always be found exactly suited to my purpose, I beg that my readers will charitably attribute it to my little experience in the niceties of speech. Indeed, it is in what concerns the style of this work that I am especially anxious to bespeak their indulgence. Little practised in composition, I have been desirous to give my own thoughts in my own words, and in doing so have not, I fear, benefited the language of these pages, and have delayed them longer than the merit of their contents may seem to have deserved. In what regards my facts and conclusions I cannot feel much apprehension: the first are, to the best of my judgment, strictly stated, and
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the last were drawn because they seemed to follow the premises, and if they be not adopted will only have the fate of others better than themselves.

In making acknowledgments it seems almost superfluous to state that I am under the deepest obligations to Sir Joseph Banks, whose support to my scientific views was the natural consequence of their being laudable and useful. In leaving England I carried with me his instructions respecting the objects to be kept most closely in view during my absence, and since my return have derived from the freest access to his library and herbarium all possible facilities in constructing this work.

Of the assistance of Robert Brown, Esq. the following pages bear sufficient evidence. His description of a new genus, which, in friendly partiality, he has named Abelia, and of two new species of plants, the one leading to the establishment of a new natural order, and the other fixing the place in the natural method of a genus hitherto of doubtful affinity, gives unequivocal value to my Appendix.

To Mr. Morrison’s journal I owe in a great measure the short account of the progress of the Embassy during the period of my illness, and some interesting notes respecting transactions from which I was absent. Some of these notes would have been incorporated with the text had I possessed the journal at an earlier period. To Mr. Cooke’s journal I have been also much indebted, and to the same gentleman I owe two drawings which illustrate the book. The drawings of the Quercus Chinensis and Eurya Chinensis are from the tried pencil of my friend W. Hooker, Esq. To Mr. H. Raper, an officer of the Alceste, I am indebted for all the geological views, except two, of the Cape of Good Hope, taken on the spot, and possessing not their least value in their minute accuracy. The plate of the temple of Quong-ying is from a sketch which I obtained from the kindness of Sir George Staunton. The other drawings, not bearing the names of professed artists, I am answerable for.
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For that part of the "Chart showing the track of the Alceste," which gives the line of the Corean coast and the Corean archipelago, I have to thank the Rev. Mr. Taylor, chaplain of the Alceste. The more general map of China, and the map of the route of the Embassy on the Yang-tse-kiang, are reduced from the great map of the Jesuits. My object in giving the former has been to convey to the reader some notion of that very peculiar character of the country, which arises from its universal intersection by navigable rivers and canals, as well as to show the whole route of the Embassy. Its accuracy of course depends on that of the Jesuits, which we had no opportunity of verifying, but had no occasion to suspect. It so far, however, differs from the map of the Missionaries in containing the names of a greater number of places in the line of our route than the original, and in having the nature of the banks of the rivers passed over by the Embassy marked upon it, when this could be done without producing confusion by crowding the letter-press. The same observations apply to the map of the Yang-tse-kiang and Po-yang lake.

The meteorological tables contained in the Appendix, although very imperfect, will be thought perhaps to have merited insertion as adding to the very few facts that we already possess regarding the atmospheric phenomena of a part of the world so little known. I have scarcely as much to say for the Itinerary of our route. It is of some consequence in reference to the maps, and in containing distances extracted from a Chinese Itinerary: an excuse for its insertion may be found in the small space which it occupies.

In conclusion, I must not forget to point out the fidelity with which the engraver, Mr. Fielding, has executed his department of the work, or to acknowledge the interest he took in the progress of it, and his anxiety that the accuracy of his pencil should correspond with the nicety of my own wishes in subjects not so frequently under the eye of an artist.
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