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Edited by Frank Cundall

Excerpt

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LADY NUGENT'S JOURNAL

CHAPTER I

APRIL, 1801—DECEMBER 31, 1801

I MUST preface my intended Journal by saying, that it commences immediately after we had terminated a residence of some years in Ireland, of which we were both heartily sick, tired, and disgusted; having witnessed during the Rebellion, which broke out in 1798, all the horrors of a civil war, during which my dear husband had the command in the north; so that he was not only obliged to meet the poor, infatuated, misguided people in the open field, but, after defeating them there, had also the distressing task of holding courts martial, and signing the death warrants of very many, which was indeed heart-breaking to us both.

After the suppression of the Rebellion, we wished to refresh ourselves and recruit our spirits, by returning to England; but Lord Cornwallis so earnestly desired that General Nugent would remain, and act as his Adjutant-General, that we took up our residence in Dublin, where we were aiding and abetting in all the odious *tracasseries* of the union between the two countries, till that point was carried. A change of Ministry then enabled General N. to resign his situation, and, to our great joy, on the 5th of April, 1801, we arrived once more in dear England.

A few days after our return, General Nugent was surprised by his appointment as Lt.-Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Island of Jamaica. We were neither of us

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over well pleased ; but, like good soldiers, we made up our minds to obey.

As I had a cough, and was otherwise unwell from the anxieties of our Irish campaign, the doctors advised that I should not sleep in town. General N. accordingly took a little place at Hampstead, where we spent a most agreeable time, till the first week in May, when we took up our abode at Reddish's Hotel in St. James's Street. Our little home at Hampstead was so nice, that we regretted it very much. We had there dear Miss Acheson, and many visitors that I loved ; and, in short, I enjoyed my little abode so much, I should greatly have preferred remaining, instead of playing the Governor's lady to the *blackies* : but *we* are soldiers, and must have no will of our own.

May 22nd.—All things being ready for our departure, came the painful task of taking leave of our dear friends.—Could not sleep all night, and were glad when the bustle of the day began.—Had, soon after breakfast, a curious scene, with a despairing confession, about my friend Miss A., from Sir James Blackwood. Could do or say nothing to lessen his *misery*, but left him, poor man ! to her *mercy*.—Then, dear Lady Buckingham,* Lady Temple, little Lady Mary, and Lord G. Grenville, came to our Hotel, and we took a most affectionate leave of each other. I promised to send accounts of the Western World to my young friends, and dear little Lord George mounted the Hotel steps at parting, and just as I was about to get into the carriage, seized me round the neck, and gave me a *great* hug, and a most *sounding* kiss, before all the *beau monde* assembled in St. James's Street. This did me a great deal of good, as, in spite of all our grief, we could not help laughing heartily. We then drove to Grosvenor Street, to take leave of my poor dear mother, and many dear friends and relations ; and, at 4 o'clock, started for Winchester, where we were most comfortably seated at supper by 11.—A servant was off some time before us, and had all the horses ready, so

* The cousin of General Nugent's father.

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MAY

WINCHESTER

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we made famous good speed, and, after we had dried our tears, we amused ourselves with reading the placards and advertisements, pasted on the walls, as we passed, and General Nugent was so ludicrous, with the discoveries he made on his side of the carriage, that he made me quite merry, in spite of myself.

23rd.—Breakfasted in the Cloisters with the Comtesse Du Paet.—Mrs. Wm. Mackinnon, Fred. Mash, and Tiny, were of the party.—Bade adieu to all, and arrived at Portsmouth about 3 o'clock.—Crowded immediately with visitors; among them were the Naval Commander, &c. &c.; and General Whitelocke* and his lady (he is Commandant), and we are to dine with them to-morrow. Then came Sir Charles and Lady Saxton, and she was my most amusing visitor; she called me "your Excellency" five hundred times, I believe. At first I was rather frightened, and thought she was mad, but found her visit afterwards the most entertaining possible.—Had a little quiet dinner, and went to bed at eleven.

24th.—Captain and Mrs. Colville, with many officers and their wives, of both army and navy, came to pay their compliments after church.—Captain Colville commands *our ship*, the *Ambuscade*. He is the eldest son of Lord Colville, an old acquaintance of mine, and appears to be one of the most polite and agreeable of men.—Dined with General and Mrs. Whitelocke, and returned home at 9 o'clock to our inn.—I gave the gentlemen of our party *a fright*, which ended in discovering Billy Fitzroy and Mr. Dyke, who were in the next room. They joined our supper party, and were

* General John Whitelock, who, after a successful career, was cashiered in 1808 for his failure in Monte Video, had seen service in Jamaica in 1788 to 1795, in which year he became Colonel of the 6th West India Regiment. He married a daughter of William Lewis of Cornwall, Jamaica, sister of Matthew Lewis, Deputy Secretary of War, father of the celebrated Monk Lewis.

He served with distinction in 1793-4, in the expedition sent from Jamaica to San Domingo.

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very merry, poor fellows. To-morrow they start for Egypt, and we expect to sail for the island of Jamaica. God grant us all a safe return to our native land.

25th.—Embarked on board the *Ambuscade* frigate, of 36 guns. The yards were manned, and we were received on the quarter-deck by Captain Colville, all his officers, and many other gentlemen. Mrs. Colville accompanied us on board, and I felt for her in parting with her husband; but they seemed to me to take leave with more good breeding and politeness than affection; so my commiseration was quite thrown away.—A salute, &c. and off we sailed from Spithead, towards the afternoon.—What little wind there is they say is against us, but the weather is so fine, and the ship so quiet, I don't much care about it. My maid Johnson, and our valuable Margaret Clifford, and the General's man Forbes, with William Hallam, were our only attendants.*—All seem happy and comfortable; only the poor maids don't like their bedroom, it is so open to the inspection of the ship's company, &c. who are constantly peeping at them.

26th and 27th.—Calm, and what little wind we have is contrary.—Sit on deck all the day, and amuse myself very well, talking to General N. about the future, and really enjoying the beautiful scene around us, as we move slowly on.

28th.—The wind was boisterous all night, and we were obliged to put into Torbay in the course of the morning.—Saw a poor little wherry, loaded with stones, founder; there were only two men on board, and they, I am afraid, perished.—I went down to my cabin, and could not help feeling very melancholy, though the gentlemen comforted me with the idea that the boatmen perhaps had saved themselves by swimming.

29th.—Fired a salute for the Restoration; told little Brooke the story of Charles the First, &c. after all the noise

* When the Duke of Albemarle came out more than a century earlier, in 1687, he had allowance of passage for one hundred servants and five hundred tons of goods.

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JUNE

COVE HARBOUR

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was over.—The ship shook dreadfully, and so did I, for it was a frightful sensation altogether, though Captain Dunn told me, that Lady Horatio Seymour could fire off a gun herself. I can only say, that she has more courage, or better nerves, than I have.—Captain Talbot, R.N. and other naval visitors. Captain T.'s ship had lost a mast, which obliged him to put into Torbay.—Wind still very high, and the sea extremely rough. I don't feel in the smallest degree deranged by the motion of the ship; on the contrary, I continue to walk about, with General N.'s arm, though, as night comes on, I can't help being a little anxious.—We eat ginger-bread all the morning, and yet I am always ready for my dinner at 3 o'clock. I now begin to eat meat, and have a large glass of Hock every day, so I shall soon be a Hercules.

30th.—The wind fair.—Left Torbay soon after 8, and passed Plymouth before dinner.—In the evening fired at a vessel, and brought her to. She turned out to be only an English merchantman, from America. The sailors seemed disappointed; they had hoped for a battle, and a prize, I suppose. I was satisfied.

31st.—General N. and I read our prayers soon after breakfast; then, as usual, sat on the deck, where I am allowed a chair and small work-table, but the gentlemen could only sit on the guns.—Saw several merchantmen; one from Jamaica, in little more than a month.

June 1st.—Passed the Wolf Rock.—In the evening it rained; and blew rather hard. Not at all sick, but a little afraid when we went to bed.

2nd.—Came in sight of some Irish mountains; but there is so little wind, that we can scarcely get on at all.

3rd.—Got into Cove Harbour. Lord Gardner sent to us immediately. He is ill, but he lent us his yacht, and we went up the beautiful river to Cork. There General Myers received us, and we were paid the greatest attention to, being such *great* people as we are.

4th.—Poor dear old King George's birth-day! Parades,

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CORK

1801

jeux-de-joie, &c. &c.—Invited to dinner by General Myers,* but declined, as we gave a *grand* dinner, at one of the principal inns, to Captain Colville, his officers, &c. In the evening I had all the ladies, headed by Mrs. Myers, to tea and coffee. It is wonderful how much a *high station* embellishes! —I heard it whispered on the parade this morning, that General Nugent was one of *the finest men* that ever was seen, and Mrs. Nugent, although small, a *perfect beauty*!

Speaking of my size, reminds me of some anonymous verses, left in Grosvenor Street for me, by a smart footman, who would give no name. I will insert them here.

ANONYMOUS VERSES

How many charms are there combin'd
 Within that little frame!
 You seem by Nature's self design'd
 All Nature's love to claim.

How can so small a space contain
 So wondrous large a heart?
 I fear this riddle to explain
 Would baffle every art.

'Twas thus I reason'd, till, at last,
 Made by experience wise,
 'Twas only at my folly past
 I felt the least surprise.

Kind Nature's wisdom I confest,
 Who, with delightful art,
 Whate'er she borrowed from the rest,
 Has added to the heart.

Your sincere Friend and Admirer,

ALDIBORONTIPHOSOPHORNO.

5th.—Did not leave Cork till this evening.—Received visits all day, and went to shops. General N. laid in a stock of wines for the voyage, those on board being very so. I bought forty-five Bibles, and as many Prayer Books, for the poor sailors. They were all I could collect in Cork.

* Colonel of the 2^d West India Regiment and Commander-in-Chief of troops in the Windward Islands.

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JUNE

BAY OF BISCAY

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6th.—Sailed this morning ; a nice breeze. I felt a little melancholy, at losing sight of land again ; but I was soon cheered, for have I not my own little world with me, in my devoted husband and best of friends.

7th.—The Captain very cross ; he cannot collect the Convoy as he likes, there are so many slow sailers. Colonel Noble, too, out of humour with his dinner, and his only consolation is the good wines that General N. brought from Cork. I cannot help laughing at their wry faces, and Captain Dunn tells me all their distresses for my amusement. General N. and I read in our cabin this evening, and then sat on deck till 10 o'clock.

8th.—Still very wry faces, and some salt tripe for dinner, that increased Colonel Noble's misery beyond anything. He wishes me to complain ; my answer is, we are at sea, we cannot remedy it now, and besides, the biscuit and gingerbread are still very plentiful and good. How lucky it is that General N. laid in such a stock of gingerbread at Portsmouth.

9th.—The Bay of Biscay ! The weather fine, and we are getting on prosperously.

10th.—The ships so close together all night, that drums were beaten, &c. to enable them to keep clear of each other ; there being such a fog, that they could not well see.

11th.—The fog still continues, but the sailors say it will rain soon.

12th.—The wind blew hard, with rain, all night, but no fog. Taken aback during the night, which they say was a great risk for us all, but, thank God, we are safe. We are now going six knots an hour, but must soon slacken sail for the dull sailing ships.

13th.—High wind all night. I quaked a little, but put as good a face on the matter as I could.—The day as usual—some cross, some merry.—General N. and I read and talk, and amuse ourselves very well.

16th.—Keep our course, though the wind is not quite what Captain Colville likes, as I can see by his visage.

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17th.—The wind fair towards evening, though not a great deal of it, and this I cannot say I regret.

19th.—Saw the Island of Madeira, about 3 o'clock, but not near enough to see what it was like; only it appears very high.—A turtle feast in prospect, and Colonel Noble happy.

20th.—Beautiful weather.—To-morrow we are to have our turtle feast.

22nd.—I have not been able to write since the 20th. We have had a dreadful shock. Poor Colonel Noble is no more!—On Saturday, he sate the greatest part of the day, as usual, talking to me on the deck. Captain Twysden, of the *Revolutionnaire*, part of our convoy, sent us a turtle on Friday, and said, as our cook was better than his, he would dine with us on Sunday, and partake of the feast. Poor Colonel Noble said repeatedly, on Saturday, that he was sure some contretemps would occur, and that we should be disappointed of our turtle. I made a joke of this. In the evening he was as well as ever; we played at whist, and all went on as usual till 10 o'clock, when he went on deck, while General N. and I were preparing for bed. Just before 11 o'clock, he came down to the cabin, and was whistling in a low tone all the time he was undressing. As there was only a curtain between his cot and ours, I could hear him distinctly. The instant he put the extinguisher on his candle, he called out that he was a dead man, and should die without assistance.—General N. was so sound asleep, that I could not wake him, and therefore ran myself to poor Colonel Noble's cot. The scene was frightful! All was done for his relief that possibly could be done, but by 2 o'clock he breathed his last. I have felt completely miserable ever since; the shock was dreadful, and, alas! I fear so unexpected and so unprepared! But God rest his soul in peace! On Sunday the 21st he was buried in the sea, and a most awful ceremony it is. The Captain read the Funeral Service. Young Noble knelt by my side the whole time. He is a fine young man, and General N. appointed

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JUNE

TROPICS

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him one of his Aides-de-Camp. I am sorry to say, that he shewed very little feeling; however, he is very young, and had not, perhaps, been much with his father.

23rd.—The day calm, and the weather altogether delightful; but I cannot shake off the recollection of poor Colonel Noble, and had a dreadful dream about him last night.

24th.—The weather still fine.—I am anxious about poor M. Clifford, who is very unwell. However, she is better this evening.

25th.—Came into the trade wind.—Beautiful weather.—Flying fish, &c.—Every thing is so new and so gay around me, that I find my spirits much better; but I hate the cabin now, and live entirely upon deck.—My nightcaps are so smart, that I have tied up all my hair under them, and so sit on deck in the most comfortable manner; for I found it impossible to keep my hair at all tidy and in good order. To tell the truth, I really think I look better in my nightcap than in my bonnet, or quite as well, and, as I am surrounded by men who do not know a nightcap from a daycap, it is no matter what I do, so I please myself.

26th.—A sailor sent me a flying-fish for my breakfast. We all tasted it, but I cannot say I admire this food, pretty as it looks in the water. Feel less nervous the two last nights.

27th.—All well.—A nice breeze, and Captain C. less cross to his officers than usual.

28th.—Read Prayers in the cabin of Captain C.; all the Service but the Litany, which I read. One little brig has lost a mast, and several vessels have left our Convoy. These are the only events of to-day, excepting that I was rather disgusted with an unfeeling trait of young Noble, but I do not like to think about it.

29th.—Pass the Tropic. Neptune and Amphitrite came on board, and there was a masquerade throughout the fleet, which lasted almost the whole day. General N. and I were unmolested, and allowed to see all the sport without any annoyance. Some poor men were sadly pulled about, and

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BARBADOS

1801

shaved in the roughest manner, though all was done in perfect good humour.

July 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, and so on to Wednesday the 15th.—No variety; but sometimes squalls and occasional showers.—I have learnt to box the compass, and General N. marks our daily progress on the map. One thing I must mention, I have gone on, very regularly, with the education of my little pupil Brooke, who is a sad Pickle. I have turned the greatest part of the History of England into verse for him, to assist his memory, as to principal events, &c.

16th.—Came in sight of Barbadoes. The first appearance of the island quite beautiful. It put me in mind of the scenes in Cook's Voyages.

17th.—Early in the morning anchored in Carlisle Bay. We were immediately surrounded by boats, with naked men and women covered with beads, and bringing us all sorts of tropical fruits.—The pretty Bridgetown, the hills behind it, the palms of all sorts—in short, the whole—was most picturesque, and altogether enchanting. Landed with the usual fuss and bustle attending *Great People*.—Lord Seaforth's Aide-de-camp, to tell us that he was too ill to receive us, owing to the explosion of an air-gun.*—Found excellent accommodation at the inn; much amused with the natives; in short, we were all delighted to be on shore again, and were as merry as possible.—Gave a grand dinner to Captain Colville and all the officers of the frigate, our own suite, &c. &c. A turtle at the head of the table, and all sorts of odd dishes covering it.—Had my own two maids, to prepare my room for the night, intending to have a nice quiet sleep, without rocking; but, alas! my repose was not a little dis-

* It had been the custom "from time" (as the saying is in Jamaica) for the Governor of Jamaica to be entertained on the way out by the Governor of Barbados. Lord Seaforth, the Governor, had only arrived at Barbados early in 1801. During his tenure of office, which lasted till 1806, he did much for the amelioration of the slaves.