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978-1-108-06282-4 - Travels in Kamtschatka: During the Years 1787 and 1788: Volume 1

Jean-Baptiste-Barthélemy de Lesseps

Excerpt

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TRAVELS
I N
KAMTSCHATKA, &c.

I HAVE scarcely completed my twenty-fifth year, and am arrived at the most memorable æra of my life. However long, or however happy may be my future career, I doubt whether it will ever be my fate to be employed in so glorious an expedition as that in which two French frigates, the Bouffole, and the Astrolabe, are at this moment engaged; the first commanded by count de la Perouse, chief of the expedition, and the second by viscount de Langle*.

The

* If my pen were equal to the subject, what admirable things might I relate of these celebrated men, formed to

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conduct

The report of this voyage round the world, created too general and lively an interest, for direct news of these illustrious navigators, reclaimed by their country and by all Europe from the seas they traverse, not to be expected with as much impatience as curiosity.

How flattering is it to my heart, after having obtained from count de la Perouse the advantage of accompanying him for more than two years, to be farther indebted to him for the honour of conveying his dispatches over land into France ! The more I reflect upon this additional proof of his confidence, the more I feel what such an embassy requires, and how far I am deficient ; and I can only attribute his preference, to the necessity of choosing for this

conduct a grand enterprise with the utmost harmony ? But their exploits, and the public esteem, have long placed them above my praises.

journey,

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journey, a person who had resided in Ruffia, and could speak its language.

On the 6 September 1787, the king's frigates entered the port of Avatfcha, or Saint Peter and Saint Paul *, at the southern extremity of the peninsula of Kamtschatka. The 29, I was ordered to quit the Astrolabe ; and the same day count de la Perouse gave me his dispatches and instructions. His regard for me would not permit him to confine his cares to the most satisfactory arrangements for the safety and convenience of my journey ; he went farther, and gave me the affectionate counsels of a father, which will never be obliterated from my heart. Viscount de Langle had the goodness to join his also, which proved equally beneficial to me.

Let me be permitted in this place to pay

* Called by the Ruffians Petropavloskaia-gaven.

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my just tribute of gratitude to the faithful companion of the dangers and the glory of count de la Peroufe, and his rival in every other court, as well as that of France, for having acted towards me, upon all occasions, as a counsellor, a friend, and a father.

In the evening I was to take my leave of the commander and his worthy colleague. Judge what I suffered, when I conducted them back to the boats that waited for them. I was incapable of speaking, or of quitting them; they embraced me in turns, and my tears too plainly told them the situation of my mind. The officers who were on shore, received also my adieux: they were affected, offered prayers to heaven for my safety, and gave me every consolation and succour that their friendship could dictate. My regret at leaving them cannot be described; I was torn from their arms, and found myself in those of
colonel

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colonel Kalloff-Ougrenin, governor general of Okotsk and Kamtschatka, to whom count de la Peroufe had recommended me, more as his fon, than an officer charged with his difpatches.

At this moment commenced my obligations to the Ruffian governor. I knew not then all the fweetnefs of his character, incessantly difpofed to acts of kindnefs, and which I have fince had fo many reafons to admire*. He treated my feelings with the utmoft addrefs. I faw the tear of fympathy in his eye upon the departure of the boats, which we followed as far as our fight would permit ; and in conducting me to his houfe,

* After loading with civilities every individual engaged in the expedition, he was farther defirous of fupplying the frigates with provifions. Notwithstanding the difficulty of procuring oxen in this country, he furnifhed feven at his own expence, and could be prevailed upon by no entreaties to accept any equivalent, but regretted that he was not able to procure a greater number.

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he spared no pains to divert me from my melancholy reflections. To conceive the frightful void which my mind experienced at this moment, it is necessary to be in my situation, and left alone in these scarcely discovered regions, four thousand leagues from my native land: without calculating this enormous distance, the dreary aspect of the country sufficiently prognosticated what I should have to suffer during my long and perilous route; but the reception which I met with from the inhabitants, and the civilities of M. Kasloff and the other Russian officers, made me by degrees less sensible to the departure of my countrymen.

It took place on the morning of 30 September. They set sail with a wind that carried them out of sight in a few hours, and continued favourable for several days. It will readily be believed, that I did not see them depart without offering the most sincere

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sincere wishes for all my friends on board ;
the last sad homage of my gratitude and
attachment.

Count de la Perouse had recommended diligence to me, but enjoined me, at the same time, upon no pretext to quit M. Kallouf ; an injunction that was perfectly agreeable to my inclinations. The governor had promised to conduct me as far as Okotk, which was the place of his residence, and to which it was necessary that he should repair immediately. I had already felt the happiness of being placed in such good hands, and I made no scruple of surrendering myself implicitly to his direction.

His intention was to go as far as Bolcherefk, and there wait till we could avail ourselves of sledges, which would greatly facilitate our journey to Okotk. The season was too far advanced for us to risk an

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attempt

attempt by land, and the passage by sea was not less dangerous; besides there was no vessel either in the port of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, or of Bolcheretfk*.

M. Kosloff had his affairs to settle, which, with the preparations for our departure, detained us six days longer, and afforded me time to satisfy myself that the frigates were not likely to return. I embraced this opportunity of commencing my observations, and making minutes of every thing about me. I attended particularly to the bay of Avatcha, and the port of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, in order to give a just idea of them.

This bay has been minutely described by captain Cook, and we found his account to be accurate. It has since undergone some

* The navigation is sufficiently safe in summer, and is the only mode of travelling that is adopted.

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alterations ; which, it is said, are to be followed by many others ; particularly as to the port of Saint Peter and Saint Paul. It is possible indeed, that the very next ship which shall arrive, expecting to find only five or six houses, may be surpris'd with the sight of an entire town, built of wood, but tolerably fortified.

Such at least is the projected plan, which, as I learned indirectly, is to be ascribed to M. Kasloff, whose views are equally great, and conducive to the service of his mistress. The execution of this plan will contribute not a little to increase the celebrity of the port, already made famous by the foreign vessels which have touched there, as well as by its favourable situation for commerce*.

To

* According to the accounts of the earliest navigators, it is the most commodious port in this part of Asia, and ought to be the general depôt for the commerce of the country. This would be so much the more advantageous, as the vessels which frequent the other ports, commonly consider themselves

To understand the nature, and estimate the utility of this project, nothing more is necessary

felves as fortunate if they escape shipwreck ; and for this reason the Empress has expressly prohibited all navigation after the 26th of September.

I learned a circumstance at the same time, which confirms what I have said, and seems to have occasioned the first idea of these improvements.

An English ship, belonging to M. Lanz, a merchant of Macao, came to anchor in the port of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, in the year 1786. Captain Peters, who commanded the vessel, made proposals of commerce to the Russians, of which the following are the particulars. By a treaty which he had entered into with a Russian merchant, named Schelikhoff, he engaged to carry on a commerce with this part of the states of the Empress, and demanded goods to the amount of eighty thousand roubles. These goods would probably have consisted of furs, which the English expected to find a market for in China, from whence they would have brought back in exchange stuffs and other articles useful to the Russians. Schelikhoff repaired immediately to Saint Peterburg, to solicit the consent of his sovereign, which he obtained ; but while he was endeavouring to fulfil the conditions of his engagement, he learned that the English vessel had been lost upon the coast of Copper Island (*Ile de Cuivre*) in its return to Kamtschatka from the north-west part of America, where it was probable it had failed,

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