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Jean-Baptiste-Barthélemy de Lesseps

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Travels in Kamtschatka

Jean-Baptiste-Barthélemy de Lesseps (1766–1834), a French diplomat, served as an interpreter on La Pérouse's voyage around the world, which sailed from Brest in 1785. In 1787, on the eastern coast of the Kamchatka peninsula, he was tasked with an overland mission to get reports back to France as La Pérouse proceeded to Australia. This two-volume work, reissued here in its English translation of 1790, is a compelling account of the one-year journey from Russia to France, and a tale of endurance and resourcefulness in the face of forbidding conditions. More than a mere journal, it also relates the author's observations on the way of life in Kamchatka, its institutions and trade. Rich in detail, the work will appeal to historians and readers with an interest in transcontinental adventure. Volume 1 covers his journey from Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky to the north-eastern extremity of the Sea of Okhotsk.

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During the Years 1787 and 1788

VOLUME 1

JEAN-BAPTISTE-BARTHÉLEMY DE LESSEPS



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TRAVELS
IN
KAMTSCHATKA,

DURING THE YEARS 1787 AND 1788.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF

M. DE LESSEPS, CONSUL OF FRANCE,

AND

INTERPRETER TO THE COUNT DE LA PEROUSE, NOW
ENGAGED IN A VOYAGE ROUND THE WORLD, BY
COMMAND OF HIS MOST CHRISTIAN MAJESTY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOLUME I.

L O N D O N:

PRINTED FOR J. JOHNSON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD.

1790.

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P R E F A C E.

MY work is merely a journal of my travels. Why should I take any steps to prepossess the judgment of my reader? Shall I not have more claim to his indulgence when I have assured him, that it was not originally my intention to write a book? Will not my account be the more interesting, when it is known, that my sole inducement to employ my pen was the necessity I found of filling up my leisure moments, and that my vanity extended no farther than to give my friends a faithful journal of the difficulties I had to encounter, and the observations I made on my road? It is evident I wrote by intervals,

A 2 vals,

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vals, negligently or with care, as circumstances permitted, or as the impressions made by the objects around me were more or less forcible

Conscious of my own inexperience, I thought it a duty I owed myself to let slip no opportunity of acquiring information, as if I had foreseen, that I should be called to account for the time I had spent, and the knowledge which I had it in my power to obtain : but perhaps the scrupulous exactness to which I confined myself, entailed on my narration a want of elegance and variety.

The events which relate personally to myself are so connected with the subject of my remarks, that I have taken no care to suppress them. I may therefore, not undeservedly, be reproached with having
spoken

PREFACE.

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spoken too much of myself: but this is the prevailing sin of travellers of my age.

Besides this, I am ready to accuse myself of frequent repetitions, which would have been avoided by a more experienced pen. On certain subjects, particularly in respect of travels, it is scarcely possible to avoid an uniformity of style. To paint the same objects, we must employ the same colours; hence similar expressions are continually recurring.

With respect to the pronunciation of the Russian, Kamtschadale, and other foreign words, I shall observe, that all the letters are to be articulated distinctly. I have thought it adviseable, even in the vocabulary, to reject those consonants, the confused assemblage of which discourages the reader, and is not always necessary. The *kh* is to be pronounced as the *ch* of the
A 3
Germans,

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Germans, or the *j* of the Spaniards, and the *cb* as in the French. The finals *oi* and *in*, are to be pronounced, the former as an improper diphthong (*oi*) and the latter in the English, not in the French manner.

The delay of publishing this journal renders some excuse necessary. Unquestionably I might have given it to the world sooner, and it was my duty to have done it; but my gratitude had me wait the return of the count de la Pérouse. What is my journey, said I to myself? To the public, it is only an appendage to the important expedition of that gentleman; to myself, it is an honourable proof of his confidence: I had a double motive to submit my account to his inspection. My own interest also prescribed this to me. How happy should I have been, if, permitting me to publish my travels as a supplement to his, he had deigned to render me an associate of his

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his fame ! This, I confess, was the sole end of my ambition ; the sole cause of my delay.

How cruel for me, after a year of impatient expectation, to see the wished for period still more distant ! Not a day has passed since my arrival, on which my wishes have not recalled the Aftrolabe and Bouffole. How often, traversing in imagination the seas they had to cross, have I sought to trace their progress, to follow them from port to port, to calculate their delays, and to measure all the windings of their course !

When at the moment of our separation in Kamtschatka, the officers of our vessels sorrowfully embraced me as lost, who would have said, that I should first revisit my native country ; that many of them would never see it more ; and that in a little time I should shed tears over their fate !

A 4

Scarcely,

Scarcely, in effect, had I time to congratulate myself on the success of my mission, and the embraces of my family, when the report of our misfortunes in the Archipelago of navigators arrived, to fill my heart with sorrow and affliction. The viscount de Langle, that brave and loyal seaman, the friend, the companion of our commander; a man whom I loved and respected as my father, is no more! My pen refuses to trace his unfortunate end, but my gratitude indulges itself in repeating, that the remembrance of his virtues and his kindness to me, will live eternally in my bosom.

Reader, who ever thou art, pardon this involuntary effusion of my grief. Hadst thou known him whom I lament, thou wouldst mingle thy tears with mine: like me thou wouldst pray to Heaven, that, for our consolation, and for the glory of France, the commander of the expedition, and those
of

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of our brave Argonauts, whom it has preserved, may soon return. Ah! if whilst I write, a favourable gale should fill their sails, and impel them towards our shores!—May this prayer of my heart be heard! May the day on which these volumes are published, be that of their arrival! In the excess of my joy, my self-love would find the highest gratification.

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