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978-1-108-06536-8 - The Narrative of the Honourable John Byron Commodore in a Late Expedition Round the World: Containing an Account of the Great Distresses Suffered by Himself and his Companions on the Coast of Patagonia, from the Year 1740, till their Arrival in England, 1746

John Byron
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The Narrative of the Honourable John Byron, Commodore in a Late Expedition Round the World

John Byron (1723–86) died a vice-admiral, having earned the nickname 'Foulweather Jack' after much experience on rough seas. In 1741 he was a midshipman aboard H.M.S. *Wager* in a squadron sent to attack Spanish ships off Chile. Shipwrecked in a storm after rounding Cape Horn, the majority of the survivors turned on their captain and attempted to make their own way home. Byron was among the group who stayed with the commanding officer. In 1768, now a commodore, he published this account of the five harrowing years it took to get back to England, by which time he was one of only four survivors. Although no doubt written to give his side of the story, it appealed to a public eager for tales of dramatic endurance against the odds. Aboard the *Beagle* on Darwin's voyage, the book also informed the shipwreck in *Don Juan* by the author's grandson.

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John Byron
Frontmatter

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John Byron
Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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John Byron
Frontmatter

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John Byron
Frontmatter

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John Byron
Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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John Byron
Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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John Byron
Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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John Byron
Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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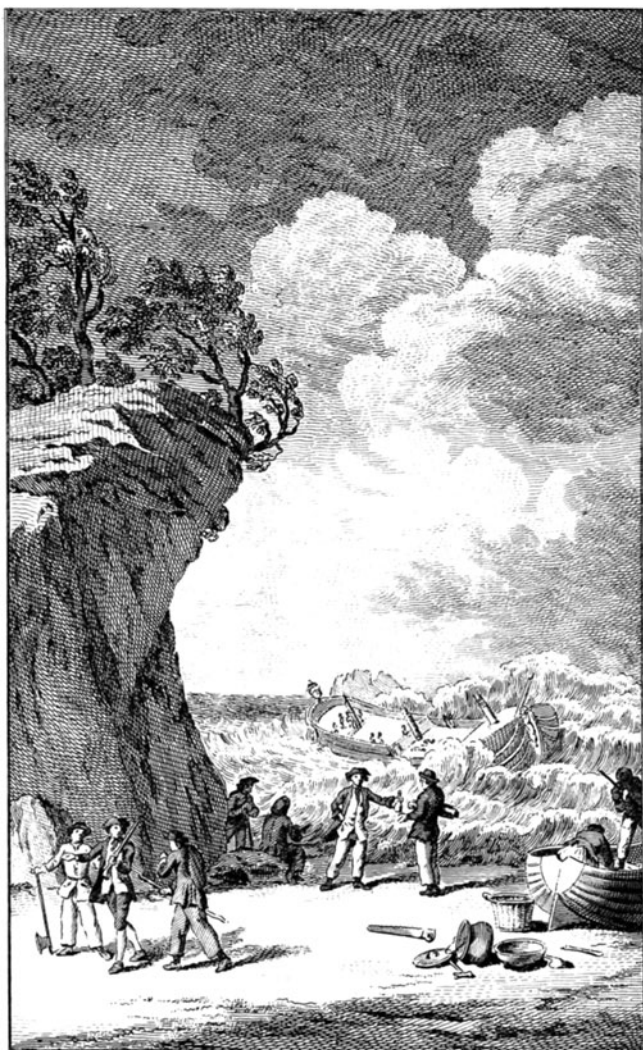
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John Byron
Frontmatter

[More information](#)



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John Byron
Frontmatter

[More information](#)

T H E
N A R R A T I V E
O F T H E H O N O U R A B L E
J O H N B Y R O N
(Commodore in a Late EXPEDITION round the WORLD)
C O N T A I N I N G
A N A C C O U N T
O F T H E
G R E A T D I S T R E S S E S
Suffered by Himself and His Companions on the
C O A S T O F P A T A G O N I A,
From the Year 1740, till their Arrival in ENGLAND, 1746.
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John Byron
Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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John Byron
Frontmatter

[More information](#)

P R E F A C E.

AS the greatest pain I feel in committing the following sheets to the press, arises from an apprehension that many of my readers will accuse me of egotism; I will not incur that charge in my preface, by detaining them with the reasons which have induced me, at this time, to yield to the desire of my friends. It is equally indifferent to the public to be told how it happened, that nothing should have got the better of my indolence and reluctance to comply with the same requests, for the space of twenty years.

I will employ these few introductory pages merely to shew what pretensions

A 23

this

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John Byron
Frontmatter

[More information](#)

ii P R E F A C E.

this work may have to the notice of the world, after those publications which have preceded it.

It is well known that the Wager, one of lord Anson's squadron, was cast away upon a desolate island in the South-seas. The subject of this book is a relation of the extraordinary difficulties and hardships through which, by the assistance of Divine Providence, a small part of her crew escaped to their native land; and a very small proportion of those made their way in a new and unheard of manner, over a large and desert tract of land between the western mouth of the Magellanic strait and the capital of Chili; a country scarce to be paralleled in any part of the globe, in that it affords neither fruits, grain, nor even roots proper for the sustenance of man; and what is still more rare, the very sea, which yields a plentiful support to many

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John Byron
Frontmatter

[More information](#)

P R E F A C E. iii

a barren coast, on this tempestuous and inhospitable shore is found to be almost as barren as the land; and it must be confessed, that to those who cannot interest themselves with seeing human nature labouring, from day to day, to preserve its existence under the continual want of such real necessaries as food and shelter from the most rigorous climate, the following sheets will afford but little entertainment.

Yet, after all, it must be allowed there can be no other way of ascertaining the geography and natural history of a country which is altogether morafs and rock, incapable of products or culture, than by setting down every minute circumstance which was observed in traversing it. The same may be said of the inhabitants, their manners, religion, and language. What fruits could an European reap from a more intimate acquaintance
with

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John Byron
Frontmatter

[More information](#)

iv P R E F A C E.

with them, than what he will find in the following accidental observations? We saw the most unprofitable spot on the globe of the earth, and such it is described and ascertained to be.

It is to be hoped some little amends may be made by such an insight as is given into the interior part of the country; and I find what I have put down has had the good fortune to be pleasing to some of my friends; insomuch that the only fault I have yet had laid to my papers is, that of being too short in the article of the Spanish settlements. But here I must say, I have been dubious of the partiality of my friends; and, as I think, justly fearful lest the world in general, who may perhaps find compassion and indulgence for a protracted tale of distress, may not give the same allowance to a luxurious imagination triumphing in a change of fortune, and sudden

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John Byron
Frontmatter

[More information](#)

P R E F A C E. v

sudden tranſition from the moſt diſmal to the gayeſt ſcenes in the univerſe, and thereby indulging an egotiſm equally offenſive to the envious and cenſorious.

I ſpeak as briefly as poſſible of matters previous to our final ſeparation from the reſt of lord Anſon's ſquadron; for it is from this epocha that the train of our miſfortunes properly commences: and though Mr. Bulkeley, one of the warrant officers of the Wager, has long ſince publiſhed a Journal and Account of the return of that part of the ſhip's company, which, diſſenting from captain Cheap's propoſal of endeavouring to regain their native country by way of the great continent of South America, took their paſſage home in the long-boat, through the Streights of Magellan; our tranſactions during our abode on the iſland have been related by him in ſo concise a manner as to leave many particulars

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John Byron
Frontmatter

[More information](#)

vi P R E F A C E.

particulars unnoticed, and others touched so slightly, that they appear evidently to have been put together with the purpose of justifying those proceedings which could not be considered in any other light than that of direct mutiny. Accordingly, we find that the main substance of his Journal is employed in scrutinizing the conduct of captain Cheap, and setting forth the conferences which passed between him and the seceders, relative to the way and measures they were to take for their return home. I have, therefore, taken some pains to review those early passages of the unfortunate scene I am to represent, and to enter into a detail, without which no sound judgment can be formed of any disputed point, especially when it has been carried so far as to end in personal resentment. When contests and dissensions shall be found to have gone that length, it will be obvious to every reader, why a
licentious

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John Byron
Frontmatter

[More information](#)

P R E F A C E. vii

licentious crew should hearken to any factious leader rather than to the solidity of their captain's advice, who made it evident to every unprejudiced understanding, that their fairest chance for safety and a better fortune, was to proceed with the long boat till they should make prize of some vessel of the enemy, and thereby be enabled to bring to the commodore a supply of stout fellows to assist in his conquests, and share in the honour and rewards.

And yet it is but justice even to this ungovernable herd to explain, that though I have said above they appeared in the light of mutineers, they were not actually such in the eye of the law; for till a subsequent act, made, indeed, on this occasion, the pay of a ship's crew ceased immediately upon her wreck, and consequently the officers authority and command.

Having

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John Byron
Frontmatter

[More information](#)

viii P R E F A C E.

Having explained the foregoing particulars, I hope I may flatter myself there are few things in the following sheets, which will not be readily understood by the greatest part of my readers; therefore I will not detain them any longer.

T H E