

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07099-7 - The Private Journal of Captain G.F. Lyon, of H.M.S. Hecla:

During the Recent Voyage of Discovery Under Captain Parry

George Francis Lyon

Excerpt

[More information](#)

PRIVATE JOURNAL.

CHAPTER I.

DEPARTURE FROM ENGLAND.

AT daylight of the 8th of May, 1821, his Majesty's ships *Fury* and *Hecla*, accompanied by the *Nautilus* transport, carrying stores, weighed, and stood out from the Little Nore.

On the 16th, having made Kinnaird's Light, near Peterhead, we sent the pilots on shore, and by them were enabled to send letters to our friends.

Making the Orkneys on the 18th, it was Captain Parry's intention to take the ships through the Pentland Firth, and we procured pilots for that purpose from some fishing-boats, which were catching cod in great plenty for the London market, to which they are forwarded by a company established for that trade at the Orkneys. We had scarcely, however, entered the Firth, when the wind came so fresh from

B

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07099-7 - The Private Journal of Captain G.F. Lyon, of H.M.S. Hecla:

During the Recent Voyage of Discovery Under Captain Parry

George Francis Lyon

Excerpt

[More information](#)

the northward as to oblige us to bear up for Wide-wall Bay, in the island of South Ronaldsha. This place, although small and shallow, afforded good shelter for our little squadron. We remained four days, and, during that period, received the most hospitable treatment from the lairds of the country. The island appeared to me even more unprepossessing than I had expected, owing, perhaps, to having left England at so fine a season; at all events, it was calculated to prepare me for the barren scenes we were so soon to visit.

On the 22d, we made another fruitless attempt to pass through the firth, but the rapid tide and strong west wind were too much for us, and we ran into Long Hope, in the island of Walls.

A heavy gale from N.N.E. confined us for three days; and on the 30th of May, we left Long Hope, passed amongst the islands near Stromness, and made an offing. Until the 6th, we had an uninterrupted fair wind, when it fell calm.

On the evening of the 7th we again recovered our favouring breeze, and as we approached nearer to Cape Farewell, saw abundance of the Cape hens, which, unlike most other sea-birds, appeared to live more on the water than on the wing, seldom rising unless disturbed. In changing their place they have a most graceful manner of propelling themselves forward; for, as they generally settle with expanded wings, so by the slightest exertion can they again shoot forward and settle, and this elegant skimming

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07099-7 - The Private Journal of Captain G.F. Lyon, of H.M.S. Hecla:

During the Recent Voyage of Discovery Under Captain Parry

George Francis Lyon

Excerpt

[More information](#)

motion is often repeated from wave to wave, until they remove from the object of alarm.

We were now nearly abreast of Cape Farewell (the southern extreme of Greenland), and flattered ourselves we should pass it without a gale, although the Greenland pilots said it was impossible. As they predicted, so it happened; the evening sky assumed a wild, and to me, unusual appearance, and a heavy gale set in from the southward, blowing with great fury until afternoon of the 12th, when a gentle and favourable breeze sprung up. Two swans flew past us to the westward, and of course were looked upon as indications of our approach to the land.

On the evening of the 14th we saw our first ice-berg; and all those to whom such objects were new, afforded much amusement to the old hands, by their anxiety to see it. I was amongst the number, and gladly made a sketch of it, considering it would always be interesting to look back to my first introduction to these wondrous floating masses. It was not a large berg, and near it were several flocks of rotzes (*alca alle*) which did not appear alarmed by the ships sailing amongst them.

In the forenoon of the 16th an ice-berg was seen a-head. To one who, like myself, was a stranger to these climes, I need scarcely apologize for mentioning the novel beauty of the evening of this day. At a quarter past ten the sun set: the sky over-head was of the purest azure, here and there sprinkled with light silvery clouds of the most fantastic forms. At about

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07099-7 - The Private Journal of Captain G.F. Lyon, of H.M.S. Hecla:

During the Recent Voyage of Discovery Under Captain Parry

George Francis Lyon

Excerpt

[More information](#)

4 PASSAGE ACROSS THE ATLANTIC.

mid-heaven, in the western sky, a range of purple clouds, edged with vivid gold, formed a delightful contrast with the softened crimson of the setting sun. In opposition to this glowing scene, the eastern heavens were filled with heavy clouds of a brilliant whiteness, and cold appearance, backed by a clear blue sky. The calm sea exhibited, in a softened degree, the beauties above it, and its surface was occasionally ruffled by the rapid motions of large shoals of porpoises, attended by multitudes of birds. The ships lay motionless together, and their bells alone broke the universal stillness. This delightful evening far excelled, in my opinion, any Italian sun-set; but the presence of two large ice-bergs reminded us but too well that we were in a far different climate.

On the 17th a heavy gale came on from the southward; during which a sea stove and carried away one of our quarter boats. With but little abatement in the wind we came amongst a quantity of loose ice on the morning of the 18th, and at 9 A.M. in lat. 60°. 53 N. long. 61°. 39 W., we made the pack, or main body of ice, having many large bergs in and near it. As the transport was liable to injury from the ice during this fresh weather, we stood off from it again.

The pack edge was in a straight line, and presented the appearance of a low rugged wall. The morning was gloomy, and the wind which set on to the ice kept it in continual motion: snow fell occasionally, and a slight coating of ice formed on the rigging. Over the pack I observed, for the first time,

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07099-7 - The Private Journal of Captain G.F. Lyon, of H.M.S. Hecla:

During the Recent Voyage of Discovery Under Captain Parry

George Francis Lyon

Excerpt

[More information](#)

the luminous appearance called the blink, which, although very white, was not of course to be compared with the body by which it was caused. Flocks of divers and gulls swam with unconcern amongst the rolling masses by which they were surrounded, and occasionally rising to avoid a coming wave, resumed their search for food. As first impressions are always lasting and forcible, I may be forgiven for mentioning my sensations on this day, which I can compare only with those I experienced on riding from Tripoli to take a view of the desert, amongst whose barren and inhospitable sands I was then about to undertake the tedious journey, which ended so unhappily.

On the weather moderating, we stood along the pack edge to look out for some convenient place in which to put the ships while we unloaded the *Nautilus*. As we now considered ourselves to have entered on the scene of action; many requisite preparations were made for our new service. In all whaling ships, and such as are obliged to run much amongst ice, a large and broad plank is erected across the ship, before the mizen-mast, at such a height as to afford a clear view over the bows; in order that whoever is conning, the ship may have timely notice of any heavy or dangerous pieces of ice lying in her way, and be enabled to steer her clear of them. This walk is called a spike plank, and was on this day got up in both ships. We also rove light tacks, sheets, and braces, and bent a smaller foresail with a boom at the foot, as being more easily worked than the other.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07099-7 - The Private Journal of Captain G.F. Lyon, of H.M.S. Hecla:

During the Recent Voyage of Discovery Under Captain Parry

George Francis Lyon

Excerpt

[More information](#)

6 PASSAGE ACROSS THE ATLANTIC.

In the afternoon we were surrounded by a very dense fog, which froze as it fell, and quite encrusted the rigging; it soon cleared away, and we saw a strange sail to the S.E. In the evening we observed the appearance of distant land, which we supposed was a part of Resolution Island, then 64 miles W.S.W. of us.

During the first watch a large fragment was observed to fall from a berg near us, and to throw up the water to a great height, sending forth, at the same time, a noise like the report of a great gun.

On the evening of the 20th we made fast to a berg at some distance from the pack, in order to clear the transport. Occasional gales, the necessity of making an offing, and many other of the attendant difficulties usually experienced amongst ice, prevented our entirely clearing the Nautilus until the 30th of June.

On this day Mr. Scrymgeour, of the Nautilus, dined with us, and received more messages and commissions to our friends at home than he could possibly recollect. Our letters were all written in readiness, and a fair wind, which soon sprung up, hastened his departure.

At one o'clock on the morning of the 1st July I took Mr. Scrymgeour on board his ship, and returning on board, turned the hands up to give him three hearty and very sincere cheers as he disappeared in the fog. I do not recollect that any of our faces appeared very lively during the remainder of this day. In the evening, having found a lead (or lane of

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07099-7 - The Private Journal of Captain G.F. Lyon, of H.M.S. Hecla:

During the Recent Voyage of Discovery Under Captain Parry

George Francis Lyon

Excerpt

[More information](#)

ENTERING HUDSON'S STRAIT.

7

water), we made some progress: a large whale came near us. Early on the morning of the 2d, we ran through some heavy ice, and made fast to a small berg, where we were soon beset. At noon, on the clearing up of a fog, which had for some time surrounded us, we discovered land about 10 miles from S. S. W. to W. N. W., which we immediately knew to be the Black Bluff, on Resolution Island: making sail, we were soon introduced to the company of some unusually large ice-bergs. The altitude of one was 258 feet above the surface of the sea: its total height therefore (allowing one-seventh only to be visible) must have been about 1806 feet*! We had scarcely passed this floating mountain, when the eddy tide drifted us with great rapidity amongst a large cluster of eleven bergs of a great size, and having a beautiful diversity of forms. The largest of these was 210 feet above the water.

The floe ice was running wildly at the rate of at least three miles an hour, sweeping us past the bergs, against any one of which we might have received incalculable injury. We therefore attempted to make fast to one, in order to ride out the tide (for all were aground), but our endeavours were unavailing; and the Fury had much difficulty in sending a boat for some men who were on a small berg making holes for her ice

* This, however, is supposing the base under water not to spread beyond the mass above water.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07099-7 - The Private Journal of Captain G.F. Lyon, of H.M.S. Hecla:

During the Recent Voyage of Discovery Under Captain Parry

George Francis Lyon

Excerpt

[More information](#)

anchors. We were no sooner swept past the cluster than we were instantly, and not very quietly, beset. In the evening the master and myself counted 54 bergs from the mast-head. We were now in the entrance of Hudson's Strait.

During the 3d we made some progress amongst very heavy floes; when, on the tide turning in the evening, the loose ice flew together with such rapidity and noise, that we had barely time to secure the ships in a natural dock, before the two streams met; and even then we received some very heavy shocks.

During the first watch, we watered the ship from the pools on the floe to which we were fast, and this being the first time of doing so, afforded great amusement to the novices, who even when it was their watch below, preferred pelting each other with snow-balls to going to bed. During the night the ships, although still beset, parted to a great distance from each other, evidently under the influence of some extraordinary eddy. On the 5th the weather cleared, and the ice slackened a little. Button's Islands were seen in the distance, and we made some westing; but on the tide turning in the evening, were again swept back.

At 2 A. M. on the 6th the inshore tide took the ship and swept us fast towards the rocks, past which the ice was driving at full five miles an hour. On nearing the shore, a low rugged point was observed, on which the ice was grating with extreme violence,

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07099-7 - The Private Journal of Captain G.F. Lyon, of H.M.S. Hecla:

During the Recent Voyage of Discovery Under Captain Parry

George Francis Lyon

Excerpt

[More information](#)

PASSAGE UP HUDSON'S STRAIT.

9

and we fully expected to be carried upon it. Providentially the same eddy which had caused our troubles again relieved us by taking a sudden turn, at about two cables' length from the danger, and carrying us off from it. Had we touched on a sunken rock we must have upset, as the whole body of ice would have gone over us.

To give some idea of the pressure we at this time experienced, I may mention, that five hawsers (of five and six inches) were repeatedly carried away; and at length our best bower anchor was wrenched from the bows, and broke off at the head of the shank with as much ease as if, instead of weighing twenty-one cwt., it had been of crockery ware. The crown fell on the ice, from whence we launched it as soon as possible into the sea, lest, as it was painted with the ship's name, it should, on being driven to sea, give rise to some unpleasant conjectures. Our troubles, even now, were not at an end, for we soon perceived a large berg, which had once before threatened us, coming to the ship very rapidly, while any attempt to avoid it would have been of no avail. When at about half a mile distant a large fragment was detached, and fell with a loud and, at that time, no very agreeable noise. By 4 A. M. it had passed close astern of us. Its height, we supposed, was about 150 feet. In the course of the forenoon the ice carried us gradually off the shore, and further from it than the Fury, who was now as far west of us as she had been east on the preceding morning.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07099-7 - The Private Journal of Captain G.F. Lyon, of H.M.S. Hecla:

During the Recent Voyage of Discovery Under Captain Parry

George Francis Lyon

Excerpt

[More information](#)

On the forenoon of the 8th we were carried to the same point as on the 6th, and had, if possible, a narrower escape. A large floe, to which we were fast, had acquired a rotary motion, and by this means the ship and it were exposed by turns to the danger. Mr. Fife came down from the crow's nest, and very quietly told me we should be on shore immediately, as he saw the rocks close to us. Our former favouring current, however, again swept us out of danger. In the afternoon we joined the *Fury*, and, making fast to the same floe, were both close beset for seven days. During this long period we saw two ships under Resolution Island on the 13th, also beset, and on the 14th, a third joined them.

In the forenoon of the 15th we made a little progress, but were again beset, and made fast to a small berg, under the lee of which was a small space of open water, as is generally the case with these bodies; for in consequence of their great draught, the floes and comparatively light ice soon drive past them, so that a ship is sometimes left in clear water whilst hanging on to one. This was a remark of Captain Parry's in his last voyage, and we had in the present frequently seen the same effects from large floes. During the first watch a heavy body of ice came up against the wind, and bore us with great force against the berg: our bowsprit first took it, but we received no further injury than the loss of the dolphin striker and a few small ropes. We then got clear, and a very dull rainy night followed.