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978-1-108-07375-2 - An Account of a Voyage in Search of La Pérouse Undertaken by Order of the Constituent Assembly of France, and Performed in the Years 1791, 1792, and 1793: Volume 1

Jacques-Julien Houtou de Labillardière

Excerpt

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AN ACCOUNT
OF A
V O Y A G E
IN SEARCH OF
LA PÉROUSE,

CHAPTER I.

Departure from Brest.—Arrival at Santa Cruz, in the island of Teneriffe.—Journey to the Peak.—A sailor who was just drowned is restored to life.—Some daring thieves steal his clothes.—Two naturalists seized with a spitting of blood, which prevents them from ascending to the summit of the Peak.—English ships in the road of Santa Cruz.—Different results of observations made for ascertaining the variation of the magnetic needle.—A new volcano to the south-west of the Peak.

THE equipment of the two ships destined for the voyage which we were going to undertake, was in a very forward state towards the end of

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the month of August 1791, when Commodore D'Entrecasteaux gave us notice to repair to Brest. I had the pleasure of performing this journey with three persons belonging to the same expedition, Citizens Riche, Beaupré, and Pierfon.

We arrived at Brest on the 10th of September. The finest ships of France, such as the *Majestueux*, the *États de Bourgogne*, the *Amérique*, &c. were then in the harbour.

While the astronomers were occupied by observations for ascertaining the rate of going of the watches and time-keepers, the naturalists hastened to complete the articles necessary for the preservation of the collections which they purposed making in the new countries that they were going to visit.

As it was my intention to devote myself particularly to the observation of vegetables, I had occasion for a quantity of paper, and I wished to meet with some of a very large size. I had considerable difficulty in procuring twenty-two reams because almost all that remained in store had recently been issued for the service of the artillery.

Part of the time that I had at my disposal, was employed in visiting the botanical garden, which is kept in high order. In the same place there is a small cabinet of natural history, in which

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which I remarked several anatomical preparations that had been presented by Citizen Jouanet, surgeon of the *Espérance*.

The ships companies were mustered in the harbour on the 21st of September.

On the 25th, our ships went into the road, where there were then not any foreign vessels, nor many French.

We were deeply laden. Indeed our draught of water was, at the time of our departure, four meters forty-six centimeters and a half, or thirteen feet nine inches, abaft, and four meters seventeen centimeters, or twelve feet six inches, forward*.

There were on board the *Recherche* :

- 6 Eight pounders.
- 2 Thirty-six pound carronades.
- 6 Swivels of a demi-kilogram.
- 12 Swivels of a double hectogram.
- 45 Muskets.
- 35 Pistols.
- 50 Sabres.
- 30 Pole-axes.
- 10 Musketoons.

* On due consideration, the translator has thought proper to retain the new French weights and measures, a table of which will be found at the end of the second volume. The only exception that he has made to this rule is respecting the depth of water, which is expressed in fathoms.

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The *Espérance* had nearly the same means of defence; and these were sufficient for protecting us against any enterprise on the part of the savages.

The two ships were provided with a great quantity of articles destined to be distributed among the natives of the South Sea. Iron tools, stuffs of different colours, and particularly of red, formed the chief of our stock of articles for traffic.

Each of our ships carried eighteen months provisions. We were ready to sail, and were waiting only for a fair wind, when a tolerably fresh breeze from the eastward permitted us to get under way, about one o'clock in the afternoon, on the 28th of September. No sooner had we got clear of the road, than it was discovered that two sailors and a boy, who were extremely desirous of making this voyage, and much vexed at not being included in the number of the ships companies, had concealed themselves on board. As we had scarcely the room necessary for those who were destined for the voyage, the Commodore stood into the road of Bertheaume, whence he ordered these three unexpected intruders to be put on shore.

The *Espérance*, having continued her course, had got far ahead of us; but we joined her
again

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again before night, for we failed much better than she did.

We took our departure at six o'clock in the evening, being then in the latitude of $48^{\circ} 13'$ north, and in the longitude of $7^{\circ} 15'$ west; Ushant bearing north 2° west; the Bec de la Chevre south-east 4° east; and the Bec du Raz south 2° east. We were then at the distance of a myriameter from Point Matthieu. The course ordered to be steered was west-north-west: afterwards, about midnight, the ship was kept west.

On the 29th, Commodore D'Entrecasteaux learnt, by dispatches, which he was not to open till he was at sea, that Captain Huon Kermadec, commander of the *Espérance*, was made Post, and that he himself was raised to the rank of rear-admiral. This news was instantly communicated through the speaking-trumpet to the *Espérance*.

Our ensigns were immediately hoisted with the distinctive emblem of the rank which had just been conferred on the Commodore.

Another discovery was made of two marines, and a boy, who were not included in the list of the ship's company. These had till now kept themselves carefully concealed. It was no longer possible to send them on shore, because we were at too great a distance from the land;

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accordingly the Admiral allowed them to make the voyage.

As I had already been a few voyages, I imagined, that I had acquired a sufficient habit of a sea life to be no longer incommoded by the motion of the ship; but this habit had long been lost; and indeed I was sea-sick, during the first three days after our leaving Brest. I had several times occasion to remark in the course of the voyage which I have recently made, that it was necessary for me to remain only a little while on shore. to lose the habit of the sea; so that whenever we failed again, even after a very short stay in port, I was for two or three days almost as much indisposed as on my departure from Brest. Seamen, in this case, recommend eating, notwithstanding the disgust occasioned by the nausea peculiar to this kind of affection. It is not easy to coincide in that opinion; for, besides a great difficulty of deglutition, the lodgment of aliments in the stomach increases the nausea; it is an additional evil, when a person is obliged to bring them up again.

Diluting drinks, taken in a small quantity at a time, in order to assist the contractile powers of the stomach, afforded me constant relief; lukewarm water, slightly sweetened, was the drink of which I then generally made use, because

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cause it is that which is most easily procured in a ship.

There were on board, however, several persons who, although they had never before been at sea, experienced no effect from the motion of the ship. Such a constitution is very desirable when a man undertakes long voyages; for it is difficult to express the unpleasant feelings occasioned by this spasmodic affection, which, extending to every part of the body, throws a person into such a state of languor, that he hangs to life, only because he has a feeble prospect of a period to his sufferings.

From our departure, till the 5th of October, the winds were faint and variable, between the west and the north; they blew afterwards pretty fresh, varying from north-east to north, till our arrival at Teneriffe. We were not free from uneasiness respecting this increase of the wind; for, in our situation, it might become fatal to us. Incumbered in every part, with a lading far too considerable for the ship's bearings, we might overset in a heavy sea, the stowage being very incompletely arranged. It was in this state of disorder that we had failed, although the National Assembly had, near eight months before, decreed that the voyage should take place.

On the 11th of October, about fifty five minutes after ten o'clock, there was an eclipse of the

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the moon. It is very difficult to make, at sea, such an observation of it as can be relied on: Citizen Willaumez, however, deduced from his, $18^{\circ} 59' 45''$ of west longitude,

The *Eipérance* made the signal for land on the 12th, about eight o'clock in the morning.

At noon, we reckoned ourselves fourteen myriameters from the Peak of Teneriffe, which was seen to the south-east by south, majestically rearing its head above the clouds.

On the approach of night, we were at the distance of only two myriameters from the north-east point of the island. We kept standing off and on under our topsails, waiting for daylight. As soon as it began to appear, we approached the coast, which we ranged along at the distance of a kilometer.

We cast anchor about half past nine o'clock in the morning on the 13th, in the road of Santa Cruz, in ten fathoms water, over a bottom of black muddy sand.

Citizen Fonspertuis, the French Consul, immediately came on board, and offered the Admiral to do every thing that he could, towards supplying the wants of our two ships.

I went on shore in the afternoon, in order to view the environs of the town. Although the season was already advanced, the reverberation of the rays of the sun, by the volcanic stones, occasioned

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caused a heat so much the more inconvenient, as the dead calm left them their full power.

I remarked among the plants which grow in the environs of Santa Cruz, a woody melissa, known to botanists under the name of *melissa fruticosa*, the *saccharum Teneriffæ*, the *cacalia kleinia*, the *datura metel*, the *chrysanthemum frutescens*, &c.

The beautiful tree known by the name of the fair poinciana (*poinciana pulcherrima*) constituted the ornament of some of the gardens.

This same evening, Citizen Ely, struck by the odd garb of some women belonging to the town, who, at the time even of the greatest heat, wear a sort of very thick woollen cloak, was employed in taking a sketch of them, when a sentry came and interrupted him, thinking that he was taking a plan of the road. It was to no purpose that he shewed him that he was only copying a dress; the soldier would not let him finish his drawing.

We had brought up too near a small vessel: for this reason, we in the afternoon carried out an anchor towards the shore, by means of which we kept at a proper distance from her.

Our bearings, taken from this point, were as follow:

The redoubt to the north of the town, north-east by east, 4° east, and the great tower situated about

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about the middle of the town, west-south-west.

On the 14th, at sunrise, each of the forts returned with nine guns, the salute which we had given them with the like number. We had fired a salute of fifteen for the citadel, which returned it gun for gun, about noon.

A packet, arriving from Spain, came and anchored in the road.

We had formed the project of undertaking, the very next day, a journey to the Peak, and of visiting successively the high mountains of the island. The French Consul was anxious to afford us all the assistance in his power; and he gave us a letter of recommendation for M. de Cologant, a respectable merchant residing at Orotava.

On the 15th, about four o'clock in the morning, we repaired to the Mole, to the number of eight; namely, Develle, one of the officers of our ship; Piron, Deschamps, Lahaye, three servants, and myself: one of the servants was sufficiently acquainted with the Spanish language to act as our interpreter. We found on the landing place, by the sea-side, some of the mules which were destined for us; but upwards of an hour elapsed before we were able to begin our journey; for it was no easy matter to assemble some of the guides, who, knowing very well that we should