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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

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An Account of a Voyage in Search of La Pérouse

Following the mysterious disappearance of the La Pérouse expedition after it sailed out of Botany Bay in 1788, the French botanist Jacques-Julien Houtou de Labillardière (1755–1834) took part in the search that departed in 1791 from Brest in two ships, *Recherche* and *Espérance*. In the space of three years, the expedition's naturalists collected numerous specimens, with Labillardière focusing on Australian flora, but their missing countrymen were never found. Notwithstanding the later confiscation of the scientific collections by the British – Sir Joseph Banks helped to secure their return – Labillardière was able to publish this narrative to great acclaim in 1800. Reissued here is the English translation of the same year, complete with a volume of finely engraved plates. The work is especially notable for its descriptions and illustrations of the indigenous peoples of Australasia. Volume 1 covers the expedition from September 1791 through to January 1793, when it reached Tasmania.

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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



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AN
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IN SEARCH OF
LA PÉROUSE,
UNDERTAKEN BY ORDER OF THE
CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY OF FRANCE,
AND PERFORMED
In the Years 1791, 1792, and 1793,
IN THE
Recherche and Espérance, Ships of War,
UNDER THE COMMAND OF
Rear-Admiral BRUNI D'ENTRECASTEAUX.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF
M. LABILLARDIÈRE,
Correspondent of the *ci-devant* Academy of Sciences, Member of
the Society of Natural History of Paris, and one of the
Naturalists attached to the Expedition.

IN TWO VOLUMES.
Illustrated by Engravings,
AND A CHART EXHIBITING THE TRACK OF THE SHIPS.

VOL. I.

LONDON,
PRINTED FOR J. DEBRETT, PICCADILLY.
1800.

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life, sacrificed your ease and comfort, have now to acknowledge your having been instrumental in affording M. LABILLARDIÈRE an opportunity of enriching natural history with a description of the specimens which he collected during his voyage with Admiral D'Entrecasteaux.

In these volumes you will, no doubt, Sir, find many objects which have before attracted your notice in the course of your circumnavigation of the globe; but among the plants here described, you will meet with several of new genera and species, or at least which appear not to have hitherto fallen under the observation of any naturalist. Of these I have endeavoured to convey, to the English botanical reader, an accurate idea: and it will be no small gratification to me to learn, that my humble attempts, in this respect, have not been unattended with success; and that, upon the whole, my translation has proved a faithful picture of the original, and not altogether undeferving of the approbation

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tion of one, who has so fully exemplified the truth of Dr. Hawkefworth's remark in his Introduction to Cook's First Voyage: " It is fortunate for mankind, when wealth and science, and a strong inclination to exert the powers of both for purposes of public benefit, unite in the same person."

I have the honour to be,

With great respect,

SIR,

Your most obedient, and

most humble servant,

THE TRANSLATOR.

LONDON,
May 2, 1800.

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

THE Voyage in search of La Pérouse had long ceased to engage the attention of the curious, and even seemed almost to have escaped the memory of the general class of readers, when, after a lapse of seven years, one of the Naturalists embarked on the expedition, recently published an account of it, a correct and un mutilated translation of which will be found in the following sheets; but, as M. Labillardière, in his Introduction, has not assigned any reason for the tardy appearance of his work, it may perhaps be not altogether uninteresting to state briefly the principal causes which have occasioned this delay.

It will be seen towards the end of the Second Volume, that, after the death of Captain Huon
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and of Rear-admiral D'Entrecasteaux, the command of the expedition devolved on M. Dauribeau, who had been previously appointed Captain of the *Espérance*. While the ships lay off Sourabaya, one of the principal settlements of the Dutch in the Island of Java, an account was received there of war having broken out between France and Holland. Although the council of Sourabaya at first detained the French officer sent to procure pilots to carry the ships into the road, they soon received orders from the Regency of Batavia not only to admit the French ships, but to furnish them and their crews with every necessary of which they might stand in need. The dysentery having at this time made considerable ravages on board, most of the gentlemen belonging to the expedition took up their residence on shore. It appears, that, three months after this, some fresh news having arrived from Europe, M. Dauribeau and the principal officers came to a resolution of hoisting the white flag, as the emblem of their attachment to the old monarchical government of France, and putting themselves under the protection of the Dutch, they

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they caused all the officers, naturalists, and such of the people belonging to the two ships as they thought would espouse the republican cause, to be apprehended and thrown into prison. M. Dauribéau at the same time seized upon all the collections of the naturalists, and soon after prevailed on the Governor of Samarang to cause their effects to be searched, in order to get possession of the manuscripts containing the observations which they had made during the voyage; but M. Labillardière and his friend M. Legrand saved their journals. The officers and other persons of the republican party were in the sequel transferred to the prisons of Batavia, and after a long confinement in the vicinity of that unhealthy spot, were exchanged, and sent to the Isle of France. The Recherche and the Espérance being left without men sufficient to navigate them, an inventory was taken of their furniture, stores, &c. by commissioners appointed on both sides; and these, together with the ships, were received by the Regency of Batavia to answer the advances made in provisions, and in other kinds of succour afforded to the officers

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and crews ; the Regency engaging that the Dutch government should account for the surplus to the King of France. M. Dauribeau died on the 22d of August 1794; and M. Roffel, then first lieutenant of the Recherche, consequently becoming the senior officer in command, took into his charge Admiral D'Entrecasteaux's journal, with all the charts, plans, drawings, specimens of natural history, &c. and early in the year 1795, embarked with them for Europe, in the Hoogly, a Dutch East-Indiaman, bound from Batavia to Amsterdam. On the 9th of June following, this and seven more Dutch ships that were in company with her, were captured off St. Helena by his Majesty's ship the Sceptre of 64 guns, commanded by Captain Effington, who was bringing home his prizes, when, in consequence of the Hoogly springing a leak, she was so near foundering, as to make it necessary to take out all her people and abandon her; this service was executed on the 2d of September, when Captain Effington ordered her to be set on fire. On the Sceptre's arrival in England, Captain Effington transmitted to the Lords Commissioners of the

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the Admiralty such of the journals, charts, plans, drawings, and collections in natural history belonging to Admiral D'Entrecasteaux's expedition, as, previous to the capture of the Hoogly, M. Roffel was conveying to Holland.

On the 12th of March 1796, M. Labillardière arrived at Paris from the Isle of France, and finding his collection of specimens of natural history in the possession of the British government, he urged the persons exercising the government of France to claim them; this application being warmly seconded by Sir Joseph Banks, they were delivered up with the most scrupulous exactness, and in a manner that reflects the highest honour on the persons immediately concerned, and, with all the other papers, charts, plans, &c. transmitted to Paris in August 1796*.

A perusal of M. Labillardière's narrative will afford the most ample proof of his being eminently

* So exact were Ministers in their compliance with this application, that the Board of Admiralty ordered a Lieutenant of the navy to be sent to Havre in a flag of truce, with the twenty-one cases which contained M. Labillardière's collections, and which had previously been in the care of Sir Joseph Banks.

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nently qualified for the situation to which he was appointed: his descriptions in natural history are at once concise and perspicuous, and bespeak the most perfect knowledge of the subject; while that part of his narrative which immediately relates to nautical matters, leaves the inquisitive geographer and cautious navigator nothing to wish for, either in respect to the configuration and extent of the coasts he visited, or their precise latitudes and longitudes, the variation of the compass, the prevailing winds, the direction and strength of the tides and currents, the situation of shoals, the soundings, &c. &c. On each of these heads enough is said for the guidance of future navigators, without descending to those frequent repetitions, which, however necessary they may be in detailing the geographical position of a newly-discovered land, never fail to tire the general reader. Hence it is, that the narrative of a mere seaman is commonly filled with a succession of nautical remarks, penned in the monotonous style of a log-book; the journal of the philosophic naturalist, on the contrary, not only abounds with lively pictures of the most interesting

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interesting productions of the creation, but is interspersed with descriptions of countries and people, manners, customs, and language; nothing escapes his active researches; none of the elements long conceal from his penetrating eye their diversified riches; he explores the inmost recesses of Nature, and reveals those beauties which lie hidden from the view of an ordinary observer.

In the nomenclature of a few particular places, I have not thought myself at liberty to depart from my original. Thus, what Captain Cook and all English navigators term Van Diemen's Land, I have, after M. Labillardière, denominated Cape Diemen. But I have ventured to amend the orthography adopted by M. Labillardière in the course of other parts of his navigation, particularly in the names of the islands lying to the northward of New Guinea, and thence through Pitt's Strait to the Moluccas. I have transcribed the names of these different islands and places from the voyage of Captain Forrest, who had more frequent opportunities of learning the names given them by the natives.

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I think it necessary to be thus explicit on this point, as I am of opinion that the names of all coasts, islands, bays, &c. given by the navigators who first discovered them should be faithfully preserved and adhered to, unless there is a possibility of obtaining the name assigned to them by the natives of the country, which should undoubtedly be preferred.

In regard to longitude, I have also followed the original, in which it is uniformly reckoned from the meridian of Paris, and after passing it to the east, is carried on easterly beyond the 180th degree, and back to the same meridian. The reader can easily reduce it to longitude from Greenwich, by allowing $2^{\circ} 20'$ for the difference established between the two meridians.

In order to save the trouble of reference, I have prefixed to this volume an INDEX of the articles of natural history, which occur in the work, containing their Linnæan or other scientific name, with the corresponding English or other name by which they are most commonly known, and likewise the pages of the volume in which they are mentioned,

In

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In the Malay, Cape Diemen, Friendly Islands, New Caledonia, and Waygiou vocabularies, at the end of the second volume, I have adapted the orthography as nearly as possible to the English pronunciation.

The main object of M. D'Entrecasteaux's voyage having been to search for La Pérouse, I now subjoin, for the satisfaction of the reader, the translation of an extract of the last letter written by that unfortunate navigator to the Marshal *De Castries*, then Minister of the French Marine, in which he specifies the track that he intended to follow on his departure from New South Wales, in March 1788.

“ *Botany Bay, 7th February 1788.*

“ I shall again make a run to the Friendly
 “ Islands, and I shall strictly perform every
 “ thing that has been enjoined me by my in-
 “ structions, in regard to the south part of
 “ New Caledonia, Mendana's Island of Santa
 “ Cruz, the southern coast of Surville's *Terre*
 “ *des Arfacides*, and the land called by Bou-
 “ gainville *La Louisiade*, and endeavour to

b 4

“ ascer-

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“ ascertain whether this last makes a part of
 “ New Guinea; or is separated from it. To-
 “ wards the end of July 1788, I shall pass be-
 “ tween New Guinea and New Holland, by a
 “ different channel than Endeavour Strait, pro-
 “ vided such a one exist. During the month
 “ of September, and a part of October, I shall
 “ visit the Gulf of Carpentaria, and all the
 “ west coast of New Holland, as far as Van
 “ Diemen's Land; but yet in such a manner,
 “ that it may be possible for me to get to the
 “ northward in time to arrive at the Isle of
 “ France in the beginning of December 1788.”

To gratify the impatience of the reader, I shall here, in a few words, anticipate the result of this voyage. When Admiral D'Entrecasteaux touched at the Cape of Good Hope, he received dispatches from M. Saint-Felix, the French Commander in Chief on the India station, enclosing him the depositions of two French Captains of merchantmen, which stated that Captain Hunter, late of the *Syrius* frigate, when passing by the Admiralty Islands, in his voyage from
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from Botany Bay to Batavia in a Dutch vessel, perceived several canoes containing savages, some of whom appeared to him to be clothed in the uniform of the French navy, but with whom, from the contrariety of the winds and currents, he could not have any intercourse. Notwithstanding the improbability of the truth of this statement, Admiral D'Entrecasteaux, with a zeal highly honourable to his feelings, did not hesitate a single moment; he changed the plan of his route, to hasten to the Admiralty Islands. His ardour not having been crowned with success, he recommenced his search in the order prescribed by his instructions, and completely fulfilled them all, by exploring, as far as was in his power, those coasts, islands, &c. mentioned by La Pérouse in his last letter, without being able to obtain the smallest information, or any thing like a ground for a probable conjecture, concerning the fate of a man, whose skill, perseverance, fortitude, and humanity, have justly entitled him to be placed at the head of those navigators of whom France may well cherish a proud and grateful remembrance.

INTRO-

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