

AUTHORSHIP OF THE ANONYMOUS ACCOUNT OF CAPTAIN COOK'S LAST VOYAGE

The whole British people were much interested in the third voyage of Captain James Cook. It was known to be the voluntary effort of England's greatest seaman to solve the riddle of the ages: "Is there a navigable North West Passage?" And thus not only the learned societies and scholars of the land, but also the general public were waiting anxiously the arrival of the first news of the expedition. For three years and more the curtain was not raised. No opportunity of reporting the progress and incidents of the voyage occurred until the vessels reached Petropavlovsk in May, 1779. From that place, by the kindness of Major Behm, the Russian commander of Kamtchatka, Captain Clerke sent Captain Cook's journal to the date of his death together with his own subsequent journal and a chart of the voyage constituting a complete record of the explorations and occurrences to that time. Captain King and Mr. Bayley, the astronomer, forwarded an account of the proceedings to the Board of Longitude. A short resumé was also prepared and despatched by express by way of Okhotsk.¹ Some of these, probably the express parcel, reached England in January, 1780. Summaries to satisfy the public desire were published in various papers including the *London Magazine* and the *London Gazette*.²

Captain Cook's journal and sketches were received by His Majesty the King. Later the more lengthy account, which had been transmitted through St. Petersburg and Berlin, was received, and in July and August, 1780, the *London Magazine* and the *London Chronicle* published summaries of the still unfinished voyage covering the period up to the arrival of the vessels at Petropavlovsk.³ The information so published was all that the hungry world knew of the detail of the expedition until after the return of the *Resolution* and the *Discovery* in October, 1780.

1. *A voyage to the Pacific Ocean, undertaken by command of His Majesty, for making discoveries in the Northern Hemisphere to determine the position and extent of the west side of North America, its distance from Asia and the practicability of a northern passage to Europe, performed under the direction of Captains Cook, Clerke and Gore, in the years 1776, 1777, 1778, 1779, 1780, in three volumes: vol. I and II written by James Cook; vol. III by Captain King, published by order of the Lords of the Admiralty, with maps, charts, portraits, etc., by Henry, Roberts and Webber; atlas (London, Nicol, 1785), 3 vols., pp. 224, 225, 233; Authentic narrative of a voyage performed by Captain Cook and Captain Clerke, in His Majesty's ships Resolution and Discovery, during the years 1776, 1777, 1778, 1779 and 1780, in search of a northwest passage (London, William Ellis, 1784), 2 vols., pp. 358, 347.*

² *London Magazine* (1780), p. 43; *London Gazette*, Jan. 11, 1780; Kitson, *Life of Cook*, p. 324.

³ *London Magazine* (1780), p. 307; *London Chronicle*, Aug. 8, 1780.

The first complete account of the voyage was published anonymously. This article will deal with the reason for its fatherless appearance and will hazard a guess—if such it can be called—as to the identity of the author. The title page runs thus:

Journal of Captain Cook's Last Voyage to the Pacific Ocean on Discovery; Performed in the years 1776, 1777, 1778, 1779. Illustrated with cuts and a chart, shewing the tracts of the ships employed in this expedition. Faithfully narrated from the original Ms. London: Printed for E. Newbery, at the corner of St. Paul's Church Yard. MDCCLXXXI.

The Société de Géographie on 14th February 1879 commemorated the centenary of Captain Cook's death and to the published report of the proceedings of the meeting is attached a bibliography in which this anonymous journal appears as number 99. From the same authority it also appears that the book, after its issuance from the presses of London, was in the same year reprinted in Dublin; in 1782 and 1783 appeared three French editions; and in 1790 it was translated into German and published in two volumes in Leipzig. These seem to be the only editions; doubtless because in the interval (i. e., in 1784) the authorized official version had been given to the world.

Great haste was shown in getting the volume through the press. This is plain from the advertisement, or editor's preface: "The editor may have his errors too; but he hopes they are such as may be pardoned. Some have arisen from haste, and some from misunderstanding the journalist's orthography, who being at a great distance, could not be consulted without retarding the Press." The book was printed and offered for sale six months after the *Resolution* and the *Discovery* had cast anchor at the Nore. It contains 386 pages, five plates of views and a chart. The *London Chronicle* of April 10, 1781 announced the fact: "Captain Cook's Last Voyage. This day was published in one volume octavo, price 6 s, in boards, illustrated with elegant cuts, and a chart showing the tracts of the ships, a journal of Captain Cook's last voyage to the Pacific Ocean for returning Omai, and for determining the existence or non-existence of a northwest passage. Performed in the years 1776, 77, 78, 79. Faithfully narrated from the original Mss. printed for E. Newbery at the corner of St. Paul's Church Yard." It was reviewed in the May (1781) number of the *Gentleman's Magazine*.⁴ The reviewer commences with the statement: "This Journal, though not published by authority, has all the marks of authenticity; yet,

⁴ pp. 231, 279.

by the way, as all the journals, charts, etc., we are told by this writer, were demanded, delivered, and sealed up, this could not have been honestly secreted." The review is quite lengthy, containing an extended summary of the work, and concludes that "the voyage is narrated in such a plain unaffected style that there can not be the least doubt of its authenticity."

In his secret instructions from the Commissioners of the Admiralty Captain Cook was required "to demand from the officers and petty officers the log books and journals they may have kept and to seal them up for our inspection; and enjoining them and the whole crew not to divulge where they have been until they shall have received permission so to do; and you are to direct Captain Clerke to do the same with respect to the officers, petty officers, and crew of the *Discovery*."⁵ As is well known, Captain Cook was killed at Karakakooa Bay 14th February 1779; his successor, Captain Clerke, died in Bering Sea in August, 1779; and the expedition returned in October, 1780, under the command of Captain James Gore on the *Resolution*, with Captain James King in charge of the *Discovery*.

It therefore fell to these two officers to enforce this order. In the footnote is given the reference to the various accounts.⁶ Ellis, in his book, is silent as the grave upon the subject. It will be noted that the Admiralty's instructions dealt only with the records kept by the "officers and petty officers;" nothing is said as to written accounts kept by the crew; perhaps they were not supposed to have sufficient education to make written entries. However that may be, the writer of the *Journal*, describing the fulfilment of this order on the *Resolution*, states that "The Commodore [Captain Gore] called all hands aft and ordered them to deliver up their journals and every writing, remark, or memorandum that any of them had made of any particular respecting the voyage, on pain of the severest punishment in case of concealment, in order that all these journals, writings, remarks, or memorandums, respecting the voyage might be sealed up and directed to the Lords of the Admiralty. At the same time requiring that every chart of the coasts, or any part of any of the coasts, where we had been, or draught of anything curious might be delivered up in like manner in order to accompany the journals, etc. All of which was complied with; and the papers were made up the commissioned officers by themselves, the papers of the non-commissioned officers by themselves, and the papers of the marines

⁵ *Voyage* (London, Nicol, 1785), introduction, pp. xxxv; *Idem* (Dublin, Chamberlaine, 1784), introduction, p. xxxvii.

⁶ *Voyage* (London, Nicol, 1785), vol. iii, p. 415; *Item* (Dublin, Chamberlaine, 1784), vol. iii, p. 417; Ledyard, *Journal*, pp. 198-199; Jared Sparks, *Life of John Ledyard* (Cambridge, Hilliard, 1828), p. 37; *Journal*, pp. 382-3.

and sealed accordingly in the sight of the whole crew, the papers of and common men by themselves." Captain King relates the performance of this delicate task on board the *Discovery*. He intimates his knowledge that "the greatest part of our officers and several of the seamen" had kept accounts of the proceedings on the voyage and he states that he could not, consistently with his instructions, "leave in their custody papers, which from carelessness or design, might fall into the hands of printers, and give rise to spurious and imperfect accounts of the voyage, to the discredit of our labours, and, perhaps, to the prejudice of officers, who, though innocent might be suspected of having been the authors of such publications." He, accordingly, assembled the ship's company on deck and informed them of his orders and the reasons which, in his opinion, ought to induce them to a ready obedience. His request for the delivery up of all the written records met, he says, "with the approbation and the cheerful compliance both of the officers and men," and he is "persuaded that every scrap of paper containing any transaction relating to the voyage were given up."

Yet though this was written by Captain King before his departure about the end of 1781 for the West Indies (whither he went in the *Resistance* in charge of a convoy of five hundred merchant ships) the anonymous *Journal* had then been in the hands of the public, who, we can readily believe, had greedily devoured it, for some six months. Ellis' account of the voyage appeared in 1782 and Ledyard's *Journal*, the first book printed in America relating to the Northwest Coast, in 1783. It is not insinuated that Ledyard retained his journal. We know that it was given up.⁷ It seems difficult to reach the same conclusion as regards the other two writers.

It is probable, therefore, that while Captain King may be right in believing in the complete compliance with the order upon the *Discovery*, he is incorrect in reference to the *Resolution*; for the three unofficial accounts above mentioned were all written by persons then upon the latter vessel. The journalist's statement that all the written memoranda were given up carries its confutation on its face. We must conclude either that he did not hand in his journal or that he kept a copy of it, or, at any rate, extensive notes therefrom. It is inconceivable that anyone could from memory reproduce the details of daily occurrences, extending over a space of four years, with such minute exactitude. The hypothesis that the journalist obeyed the order and that his journal was returned to him later is unmain-

⁷ Sparks, *Life of Ledyard*, p. 37.

tainable for two reasons: first, the short space of time intervening between the return of the vessels and the appearance of the *Journal*; and second, because of the motive of the demand which is accentuated by the fact that Captain Cook's widow was to share in the profits of the official publication.⁸ The secret retention of the *Journal* doubtless accounts for its anonymous appearance; though what the writer expected to gain by his false statement it is difficult to conceive. Jared Sparks, in his *Life of Ledyard*, says: "To satisfy public curiosity till a complete work could be prepared a very brief sketch of the voyage in a single volume had already been *prepared by authority* in England."⁹ No authority is given for the italicized statement (the italics are ours). Besides, Sparks' premise is wrong; the official account of the voyage was written in 1781, but the publication was delayed by the preparation of charts and drawings, their engraving, and the obtaining of suitable paper.¹⁰ The *Life of Ledyard* was written in 1827, long after his death. Everything considered one prefers the view of the English reviewer which is consistent with the anonymous appearance; furthermore, the statements concerning Omai and also those animadverting upon the conduct of Captain Cook and his officers are not such as would appear in an authorized account. A comparison of the *Journal* with the official quarto edition is extremely difficult. The dates do not agree in most instances; and in dealing with the occurrences at any of the islands the journalist describes those that doubtless impressed him, but the corresponding record in the official report relates to something entirely different. For instance the journalist spends twenty-five pages in describing the adventures of some men of the *Discovery* who got lost on Christmas Island, while the incident is barely mentioned in the official version.¹¹ The positions of the respective writers and the fact that they are upon different ships explain, of course, many of the apparent differences.

Who, then, was the author of this surreptitious volume? Since obtaining my own copy, some five years ago, I have striven to solve the problem. At the outset it was manifest that the bookseller's statement that it was "probably written by John Ledyard, who was on board the *Resolution* as sergeant of the marines," was incorrect. The genesis of Ledyard's journal as given by Sparks is that he had surrendered his journal on request, that it had not been returned to him, that on his arrival in Hartford, Connecticut, being importuned

8 Kitson, *Life of Capt. Cook* (London, 1912), p. 325.

9 Sparks, *Life of Ledyard*, p. 38.

10 *Voyage* (London, Nicol, 1785), introduction, pp. lxxxv et seq.

11 *Journal*, pp. 191-221.

by his friends to publish an account of the voyage, he obtained a copy of the anonymous journal now under discussion, and used it as a basis for dates, distances, courses, and generally for the purpose of refreshing his memory, adding to it his own comments and discursive remarks.¹² Perhaps the bookseller may have based his surmise upon the similarity of the two volumes, without knowing its explanation, coupled with the fact that Ledyard's account of the sailor who would marry the New Zealand enchantress and rule in the land is verbatim with that contained in the *Journal* and that the last 38 pages of Ledyard,¹³ being almost one-sixth of his book, are verbatim with the *Journal*. He overlooked the fact that Ledyard was on the *Resolution* throughout the voyage whilst the unknown author of the *Journal* was, until August 1779, on the *Discovery*.

The author was not, therefore, John Ledyard. But who was he? I believe that the question can be answered by a study of the internal evidence afforded by the book itself, and by working along the line of elimination. The many references to the crew, as "our people," "the common sailors," "our seamen," "the common men"¹⁴ are couched in language which clearly indicates that the hidden journalist is not to be found amongst that class. For a similar reason we may conclude that he was not one of the armourers, nor one of the carpenters, nor in any way connected with them, e. g., "our artificers," "the carpenters, armourers, and other artificers," "our carpenters," etc.¹⁵ Nor was he either the surgeon or the surgeon's mate, as is certain from such expressions as "Mr. Law, the surgeon and several more of us."¹⁶ He was neither Mr. Webber, nor Mr. Edgar, the master of the *Discovery*.¹⁷ He was manifestly one of the officers or gentlemen of the *Discovery* and was, as the entries show, one acquainted with the navigation of the vessel. The description he gives of the reception of Captain Cook and his officers at Otaheite, (Tahiti) together with the cut of the heiva on that occasion, shows that he was present as one of the latter.¹⁸ The vessels' courses are given so frequently and so exactly that it is plain that they were matters of much interest to him and upon which he could speak at first hand.

All the entries in the *Journal*, from the outset until 25th August, 1779, relate to occurrences on or connected with the *Discovery*;

¹² Sparks, *Life of Ledyard*, p. 38.

¹³ Pp. 170-208.

¹⁴ *Journal*, pp. 83, 86, 91, 128, 149, 268, etc.

¹⁵ *Journal*, pp. 136, 144, 164, 172.

¹⁶ *Journal*, p. 90.

¹⁷ *Journal*, pp. 342, 315.

¹⁸ *Journal*, pp. 131, 141, and especially 142-147.

after that date they deal with the events on the *Resolution*. It would therefore appear to be clear that at this time our journalist was removed from the one vessel to the other. At Petropavlovsk, after Captain Clerke's death, certain changes were made which are thus described by Captain King:

"In the morning of the 25th [August, 1779] Captain Gore made out the new commissions, in consequence of Captain Clerke's death; appointed himself to the command of the *Resolution*, and me to the command of the *Discovery*; and Mr. Iangan, Master's Mate of the *Resolution*, who had served in that capacity on board the *Adventure* in the former voyage, was promoted to the vacant Lieutenantcy. These promotions produced the following further arrangements: Lieutenants Burney and Rickman were removed from the *Discovery* to be First and Second Lieutenants of the *Resolution*; and Lieutenant Williamson was appointed First Lieutenant of the *Discovery*."¹⁹

The *Journal*, referring to these changes, says: "Mr. Gore went on board the *Resolution*, and Mr. King, First Lieutenant of the *Resolution* took command of the *Discovery*. Other promotions took place which the reader will remark by the sequel."²⁰

Having eliminated all the lower grades and reached the conclusion that the unknown journalist is to be sought amongst the officers of the *Discovery* and only amongst those who were transferred from the *Discovery* to the *Resolution* on 25th August 1779, our search is now limited to those three persons: Captain Gore, Lieutenant Burney and Lieutenant Rickman. The language of the *Journal* e. g. "our Captain," "Captain Gore," "the commodore," etc.,²¹ not to speak of the repelling suggestion that he who was to enforce the order for delivery of the journals should himself break it, would seem to eliminate Captain Gore. To this may be added the fact that Captain Gore sailed as first lieutenant of the *Resolution* and was not on the *Discovery* until he was promoted to her command after the death of Captain Cook. He therefore lacks one of the identifying marks of this journalist. Such an expression as "Mr. Burney, Mr. Law; the surgeon, and several more of us,"²² disposes of Mr. Burney. In any event the style of the book is not Burney's as can readily be seen by comparing it with his monumental work, *Voyages in the South Seas*."

¹⁹ *Voyage* (London, Nicol, 1785), vol. iii, p. 285; *Idem* (London, William Ellis, 1784), vol. ii, p. 296.

²⁰ *Journal*, p. 358.

²¹ *Journal*, pp. 359, 365, 382.

²² *Journal*, pp. 80, 90.

⇒ Thus we reach the conclusion that the author of the *Journal* was John Rickman, who sailed as second lieutenant of the *Discovery* and returned as second lieutenant of the *Resolution*. As a further support to this deduction it may be added that if a list of the officers of the *Discovery* be checked with the references in the *Journal* it will be found that every one of them is mentioned either by name or position except one—John Rickman. This would chord with the manifest desire to hide himself, which our author shows, as above quoted, in speaking of his promotion to the *Resolution*.

If the result obtained meets with approval, it would seem well to refer to this anonymous work hereafter as Rickmans' *Journal*.

I cannot close this short article without expressing my thanks to Dr. Adam Shortt, F.R.S.C. of the Archives Department, Ottawa, to whom I am indebted for the references to this *Journal* in the files of contemporary publications.

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