

## IN NEED OF FINANCIAL HELP

Mrs. William Pitt Trimble, of Seattle, one of the most successful collectors of Northwest Americana, has secured an original letter by Captain George Vancouver, the famous explorer. She has permitted a copy of the letter to be made for this *Quarterly*.

The letter occupies a page and a half of paper, nine and a half by eight inches to the page. Evident care was bestowed on the writing as there are three explanatory interlineations. On the top and bottom margins of the first page there are entries in a different handwriting as follows: "Capt. Vancouver to Js. Sykes Esq. dra." "a Dutch East Indiaman taken by Cap. V. near St. Helena, 1795." On the bottom margin of the second there appears in the same different handwriting: "Cap. Geo. Vancouver accompanied Cap. Cook in the Resolution in 1771, on the voyage he then made round the World. Capt. Vancouver also went on a voyage of discovery to the North Pacific Ocean and round the World—performed in the years 1790. 91. Capt. Vancouver died May 1798, at Petersham—Richmond Surry."

The letter, with spelling and faulty punctuation carefully copied, is as follows:

Petersham, Jan<sup>ry</sup> 11:1798

Dear Sykes

The receipt of yours yesterday; of the 7th. afforded me some satisfaction to find there is at length a probability of our shortly touching the cash— This was the more agreeable as the generality of my creditors have been lately rather a little importunate and as it is my intention; not only to discharge the whole of my debts, but also such little matters as I have become answerable for others, out of the funds which the Macassar is to produce, you must not be surprised if in the course of next week or ten days my demands should be a little heavier on you than usual, they may perhaps amount to near two hundred pounds exclusive of the stationers demand; which will place me *most completely on velvet*—excepting the incurring expenses of the publication; which will I trust at no very remote period be by itself most amply reimbursed.

I thought it was necessary to apprise you of the probability

of my making this demand upon you, as also that I this day drew upon you for forty pounds, payable to Mrs. Ruth Price or bearer.

The Tea which your good Daughters were so obliging as to procure, has turned out exceedingly good; particularly the Sou-chong, which I have liked so well as nearly to have used it all, and I think it agrees much better with me than the green, I will therefore further intrude on their goodness to send me down four pounds more of it; by the Ham & Richmond coach— I sincerely hope Mrs. Sykes is again restored to health, and with best wishes to yourself and family I remain

D<sup>r</sup> Sir

Yours most sincerely

Geo: Vancouver

The dean of the historians' guild in America, John Franklin Jameson, Director of the Department of Historical Research, Carnegie Institution of Washington, and Managing Editor of the *American Historical Review*, has complained of writers who "annotated documents to death." There is a temptation to join those meriting such wrath in this particular case.

Vancouver is justly held in great renown here in the Pacific Northwest and in other parts of the greater Pacific Rim. He discovered and named Puget Sound, Chatham Islands, and other places of importance and he explored many regions previously visited by other discoverers. A letter by him on any subject would be cherished and here is one relating to difficulties encountered while preparing for publication the first edition of his great *Voyage*. Those who know that monumental work will thrill with sympathy on reading this letter.

The parish record at Petersham (near London) shows that he was buried there on May 18, 1798. That the four last months of his life, after writing this letter, were filled with similar financial troubles may be conjectured from the fact that his brother John Vancouver wrote the dedication "To the King," in which he referred to his brother's death and adding the hope that "Your Majesty will, with the same benignity, vouchsafe to accept it from my hands, in discharge of the melancholy duty which has devolved upon me by that unfortunate event." In the "Advertisement" John Vancouver, as editor, says his brother was constantly employed from his return to England in November, 1795, until a few weeks before his death "in preparing the following journal for publication."

Mention of the *Macassar* as a probable source of funds with which to pay his debts draws attention to happenings at St. Helena in July, 1795, when the *Discovery* and the *Chatham* arrived there on the way home from the Pacific. Finding that his country was at war with Holland over South Africa, Captain Vancouver there detached the *Chatham* as a dispatch carrier in command of Lieutenant Peter Puget and he also captured the Dutch East Indiaman *Macassar*. To make sure that his prize would reach England he detailed a crew of his own men under Lieutenant James Johnstone, in whose honor he had previously named Johnstone's Strait between Vancouver Island and the mainland. His own share of prize money from the *Macassar*, Vancouver hoped, would pay all his debts, pending which the two hundred pounds from Sykes would place him *most completely on velvet* (underscored in the original), a piece of slang usually felt to be more recent than 1798.

The dignity and kinly familiar courtesy of the letter's final paragraph are self evident.

The identity of "Dear Sykes" is not difficult to fix upon although it is a great pity we cannot find more particulars about the personality of Vancouver's friend in his time of need. The added entries on the margins of the letter were probably written by Sykes himself soon after Vancouver's death. The penmanship is better than that of Vancouver. In the first marginal note he adds "Js.", for a first name which had not been written in the letter by Vancouver. After his own name he wrote "Esq' and "dra", the latter evidently for "draughtsman."

When the great work was published most of the illustrations carried the small-print line: "W. Alexander del: from a Sketch taken on the Spot by J. Sykes." Among the illustrations thus signed is the first picture ever made of Mount Rainier, to which signature is added "J. Landseer, Sculp." thus identifying the engraver as well as the artist and sketcher or draughtsman.

That these marginal notes were written between the time of Vancouver's death and the appearance of the published work seems to be evidenced by the date of Vancouver's death and the citation of the years of the great voyage as "1790.91." The matter set forth on the title-page is extensive and one line is given to the years as: "1790, 1791, 1792, 1793, 1794 and 1795." Sykes would hardly have been content to write "1790.91", if he had seen that title-page in print.

In the *National Dictionary of Biography* there are biographies of several men named Sykes, but J. Sykes is not among them nor is there evidence of his relationship with those recorded. It is sincerely hoped that future searches may produce information about the draughtsman and friend so intimately associated with Vancouver's important contribution to world knowledge.

After the above was in type another original Vancouver letter was received which makes plausible the inference that "Dear Sykes" was the father of the sketcher who accompanied the expedition round the world.