

A. J. Mynington

MIDSHIPMAN'S DIARY;

A

FEW NOTES

EXTRACTED FROM THE

COCKPIT JOURNAL OF A MAN-OF-WAR;

AND DEDICATED TO

SIR JAMES MATHESON, BART., M.P.,

BY

THE AUTHOR.

*Bedford Clapperton
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MDCCCLXII.

a mortar, remaining to defend the town, which was at one period strongly fortified—that day has fled! The streets are filthy—the poor, lame, and diseased innumerable, and flock round you every time you stop, to solicit “Un real, por el amor de Dios.”

After completing provisions and water at the pretty little island of “Taboga,” of which I shall have much to relate by-and-bye, we sailed on a long sea voyage up the coast of North America, towards the Straits of Juan de Fuca, where the celebrated Spanish pilot of that name imagined he had discovered a passage through the continent.*

The voyage occupied seventy days, during which time we did not even see land; four of our crew died from the many privations and hardships encountered on that long voyage. The monotony, the dreariness, the scarceness of fresh water, with bad provisions, along the burning shores of Western America, were severely felt, and we only found ourselves reviving when the fresh and chilling breezes met us off Vancouver Island.

Several pieces of broken timber, rugged trees, drift wood, and kelp-weed, told us we were fast approaching the land; and the joy of all at seeing it was beyond

* Cook, who passed here some years after its discovery, disbelieved in the existence of these straits. To use his own words, he says, “In this lat., 48° N., geographers have placed the pretended Strait of San Juan de Fuca, but nothing of that kind presented itself to our view, nor is it probable that any such thing ever existed.” This, I think, is the only instance of that celebrated circumnavigator being in error.

description. The sea abounded in whales, lashing and spouting in every direction. Shoals of porpoises, followed by birds, are close after our wake, and the land appears covered with a dense forest of pine-trees. The moment the wind fell light, we were visited by a handsome canoe, having eight natives, with a chief, bringing fish, bear-skins, squid, &c., all of which they readily bartered for knives, tobacco, and paint, &c. I quite gained the friendship of the chief by daubing his face all over with colours of red, white, and black, giving him (to us) a most hideous appearance; but when shown his face in a looking-glass, he was delighted, frantic with joy. They all wished to be painted the same way. His arms and body were covered with "friendly marks," which are lumps of flesh bitten out or cut with sharp shells* by his *friends*; there were seven or eight such marks on him. We very much feared they would be performing their friendly actions on us, so we prepared to repel them. We found they were very loose and filthy in their manner—no pride at all about them—and wear a plain rug thrown over their shoulders, which is cast off altogether at intervals. They existed, while alongside, on long strips of squid, which they "bolted," after chewing a short time, without a wink or struggle. Later in the day, a smaller canoe came off with dried salmon and berries, rather sour and unpalatable.

After getting fairly inside the Straits of Juan de Fuca, and anchoring among a fleet of thirty-eight canoes,

* Kings, xviii. 28.

each having two, three, or four salmon on board, we were visited by a personage calling himself "Flattery Jack," who had been spoken of by former voyagers. He said, "Man' war ship cloosh" (good); "No cock-shittle man war," that is, they would not break or harm us. This "Flattery Jack" drew a smile from everyone, from some roars! He had on his body a long red Yankee coat, a *very* taut pair of trousers, a black satin waistcoat strained in by one well-fingered button and hole, and covering all (and most objectionable things too) was a very much abused "four-and-nine" hat. He gave us a little information about a frigate and steamer in Puget Sound, and while doing so, unfortunately for him, *the* "Flattery Jack" arrived, with his *retinue*.

This "Jack" was a merry, good-humoured, round-faced little fellow, full of fun, and spoke very good English; his rig was "made to order," but the trousers were a little short, and the hat had seen its best days. The first Jack brought his squaw with him, the first female we had seen; they are fairer than the men, but equally careless of person, and loose in dress and manner.* A native here purchases his squaw (or wife) for a blanket or a shirt, and is allowed to have as many as he pleases; and they lend them one to another in the most friendly and accommodating manner.

The canoes with the salmon, &c., came alongside, after cheering and shouting while the anchor and cable was let go, and the sails furling. For an old pocket-

* It would be impossible to tell the original colour of these people, as they are always smeared with oil and dirt, but I should assume it to be that of a dirty copper kettle.

handkerchief, an old knife, or a few brass buttons, you could get a salmon "all alive," weighing on an average twenty-six pounds. A salmon that you would pay £1 for in London, you can get here for a few strips of tobacco or an old razor that would never cut again. Nothing now but salmon boiled, salmon fried, salmon soured, is heard and eaten all day long. If we starved during our long and tiresome sea cruise, we are now certainly making up for it. We passed up to Victoria, the Hudson Bay settlement on Vancouver Island, and lay in a calm and peaceful bay, surrounded by a dense forest, with shrubs and evergreens down to the water's edge, at the feet of the lofty mounts Baker and Olympus, perpetually covered with snow.

Here we had visits from whole families; and these tribes are called "Flat-heads," from the fact of their heads being squeezed into a conical form when young, in the following manner:—When the child is four or five weeks old a case is made of the bark of a tree in the shape intended, or most preferred, for the head; in this it is placed; the child is then put into a cradle made of wood, exactly resembling a butcher-boy's tray, and laced down with strips of bark to prevent its moving or shuffling off this "night-cap"; on the head are then placed weights, bags of sand, on the parts which require compression most, to bring it into the required and approved form. This operation is kept up for years, and then the head assumes the enviable form of a "Life Guardsman's hat." It is curious to see the mothers, when the children cry, jig them about in these trays. In many, this compression produces squint, which is con-

sidered *beautiful*! And many children are made idiots from the distortion and compression of the brain. When I first saw the Chinese children undergoing the painful and tormenting "operation for small feet,"* and the Javanese infant, having all hands clapped on its nose to flatten it, immediately when born, I thought it cruel, but this far exceeded anything I have witnessed. The children never look healthy; and tears are constantly running from their eyes, which are painfully tender.

There is an old saying, of a "dog's tail curling so tight that he cannot put his hind legs to the ground;" and of a young lady screwing her hair so tight in papers, that she could not shut her eyes to sleep; but I can really say, that I have *seen* these children's heads so tightly compressed, that a squint is thereby produced.

One morning we heard, to our surprise, that our good-tempered "Jack Flattery" was no more! He had been basely murdered for the sake of a blanket, on his passage across the straits, after bartering his other skins. He was attacked and stabbed in the back, in presence of all his family and several wives. The natives are permitted to kill one another for any individual crime (by their chiefs); but, should the person miss his aim, and the other escape, the former tribe rush on him and murder him on the spot; on the contrary, should he kill him, he is considered a great warrior. Such is the state of barbarism around us.

* The smaller the feet of the Chinese, the flatter the nose of the Javanese, and the more conical the head of the Cowitchins, the more attractive and beautiful the possessor. Truly, "travelers see strange things!"

Squirrel-hunting, puffin-shooting, as well as snipe and duck, &c., were our principal amusements; and in passing through the wood of Vancouver and the smaller islands, we could not but be struck at the lofty and magnificent cedar, pine, oak, and cypress trees, and the blossoms of the yellow laburnum scenting the air; every slope and undulation was a lawn and natural garden, studded with the wild plum, gooseberry, currant, strawberry, and wild onion. Long grass and clover intermingled the soil, rich in the extreme, and would grow anything and everything.

On one of these occasions, when we had been shooting, and venturing farther than perhaps it was prudent to do, I was one day overcome with exhaustion, and had nearly been compelled to give up. But before I narrate this adventure, it will be proper to describe one that preceded, and from which there was very little hope of a return.

One of the young officers had been out alone, and his not returning caused great anxiety; for we already knew that the tribes were treacherous, particularly the Sokes, Tselallums, and Cowitchins. All, of course, set out in search. Boats were sent along the coast, firing great guns, which was also continued on board the vessel. All day passed, and our search was vain; but we did not yet despair. Another twenty-four hours was also passed unsuccessfully, and now serious hopes were entertained for his safety. A party of Indians were sent out, and about nine at night they found him, in a weak and helpless state, under a tree, on the top of a snowy mount. The Indians had given up their search about

eight in the evening ; but the chief or leading man said " he would go a little further," and, after proceeding for a few minutes, he found him. On coming on board, it appeared to us as if he had risen from the dead. He said he had lost his way, and for the first night and day took refuge in a tree, where many wild animals came and " yelled " at him. Not being able to support himself any longer, and the beasts having departed, he came down and laid on the fern quite exhausted, and gave up all his hopes, until seen by the Indians, who deserve much praise for their instinct and perseverance. The last eighteen hours he lived on a bird that he had shot, eating it raw, but could obtain no water. Another hour, and he must have perished ; certainly that night, if not found. My misadventure was nearly the same—hardly so serious. I had got into a swamp among rushes, duck shooting, and in my anxiety had got too far, without thinking how I was to return. The mud and water was above my knees, which rendered it tiresome to walk, and the rushes far above my head. When I began to get tired, I then thought of returning, but on looking round I could see no opening—nothing but sky over my head, nothing to guide me ! After wandering about for some time in search of an opening, I became quite exhausted. The evening was fast closing in. My lips were parched with thirst. I was compelled to keep my feet going in new places, to avoid sinking so far that I could not recover myself. I could see no place of retreat. I was on the point of laying my shot-belt and gun on one side and giving up all, when I made one more effort, and struggled to a more firm footing, where I rested, and

from thence escaped. Oh! I shall never forget the feeling of that moment, when spiritless, and all hope seemed gone, and I was fast sinking. When I looked up, and saw nothing but the blue sky overhead, and the rushes obstructing everything like a guide, the dreadful thought of starvation flashed across me; in an instant all I ever knew, all who were near and dear to me, were before me; every passage and every circumstance in my life fled before me like a dream. The feelings are almost indescribable. None can know them but those who have experienced them!

To-day I was agreeably astonished at receiving a note from a very old and much-esteemed schoolfellow, who was then about seventy miles distant from me. He says, "I send this scratch in the boat that takes you unfortunate fellows your 'grub' (sheep and potatoes). I intended at first coming down, but having been so long in harbour, am afraid to undertake so long and dangerous a sea voyage. Moreover, having recently escaped the perils by land and sea of a two months' cruise through the Oregon, I do not like tempting a merciful Providence too much." He says, "I have turned into a complete savage, and have not an idea above a blanket." He also adds, "You should have been at 'our races' yesterday; everything complete, even to the Punch and Judy show;" and he ends with saying, "Give my love to that sweet girl at Victoria." and then a P.S., in which, in a truly Irish way, he says, "I have a picture of your ship in a gale of wind, and it is the principal ornament in my cabin. I've just got room for another in a corresponding first chop rosewood frame. Another would look so well!"

There is a small island at the entrance of Victoria Harbour, on which all the surrounding tribes bury their dead in this manner:—When a man dies, he is taken to this island, with his canoe and all belonging to him. The canoe is hauled up on the island, the body laid in it, and all his goods and chattels, such as his musket, salmon spear, bow and arrows, fishing lines, pots, kettles, and even the square wooden bowl he drank out of, are laid by his side, covered over with mats, pieces of timber, and large stones. Several canoes, with their late owners, were mouldering away on this island. Several we saw, also, on the forked branches of trees, at almost every bend of the river.*

A deformity is never seen, the parents destroy them the moment of birth, but we frequently meet natives with several joints of their fingers gone; on inquiring, it was ascertained that it is customary to express grief for the death of a relative by some corporeal suffering, and that the usual mode was to lose two or more joints of each finger!

We had now passed round the straits, having anchored in those beautiful harbours, Port Discovery, Dungeness, and Port Townshend, either capable of holding the British fleet, with some of less capabilities on Vancouver Island, Esquimault, Port Albert, Victoria, San Juan, Becher Bay, Soke Inlet, and now anchor where first we stayed on entering the straits. Many canoes again

* The natives consider it an ill omen ever to mention the names of those departed, and never do so; they will never touch anything belonging to the dead, and they fancy the spirit departs into animals, such as deer, bears, &c.

come alongside, and we find Flattery Jack, or King George's tribe (who was murdered), preparing to go to war with the "Tslallums," to avenge the death of their chief. They say "they intend stealing on them during the night, first shooting them and then cutting their heads off." . . . They must use some strange stratagem to effect this, as the Tslallums exceed them far in numbers. In a bay, near this anchorage, the seine was hauled, and as one of the men observed, it was a "miraculous draft." Turbot, cod, and soles in abundance; it was not the scason for herrings, nor place for salmon.

There was but one game that I saw the natives amuse themselves with, but they are very fond of gambling. As I was passing in a great hurry at the moment, I cannot tell the process, but it is with seven pieces of stick and two deer's teeth. I was told it was their only game of amusement or pastime; they play at "pitch and toss" also, for blankets, furs, and even their wives, merely at the chance of turning up one side or the other—head or tail.

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We were about to leave the straits, but I had one more duty to perform for an old schoolfellow; and it will be remembered, that he particularly requested in his note that I would, the first opportunity, "give his love to that sweet creature at Victoria." Now, this was a very pleasing duty, I had no doubt, but at the same time one that I was not prepared for, nor did I know to whom I was to deliver so affecting and tender a message.

However, do it I must, as I had promised. We were at anchor off the very place. I devoted a forenoon to this duty. I dressed in my best (which was not at any time very attractive), and I polished up my hair, teeth, and boots, with a little more than usual care, for, it must be added, I intended to put in *one* word for my school-fellow, and *two* for myself, when—withering under the gaze of this lovely object—I set out with the very best possible intentions, not knowing, however, the exact residence. I went to the rendezvous, where I knew I should meet some person who spoke English. I was right. I commenced gently, to prevent suspicion, remarking on the weather first, which mostly all people do on meeting, then the briskness of trade (of which I knew very little), and finally, coming to the point, asking if he knew where the object of my search resided? He quickly answered in the affirmative, and at the same time pointed to the house. How I should know her? was my next question, how she “rigged,” and her style? (so that I may recognise her if I passed her) with many other very inquisitive and impertinent inquiries. A final query finished the conversation, and nearly *finished* me, for, to my utter amazement, he said, “*She is my sister.*” I thought I would have shrunk into my boots; my feelings may be imagined, but impossible to describe. I hurried from the scene, declaring, within myself, never again to enter that stockade. Constant visions of the *big brother* were before me. Rifles, bullets, scalps, all passed within my imagined gaze, and it was some time before I was able to shake off the surprise that I at that moment felt.

I broke my word! A few days afterwards found me in the presence of her for whom I had so nearly suffered (in mind if not in body). All those, however, were more than repaid by one glance from the light blue eyes of Mary, who dresses also in light blue, dances the polka, is not at all vain, and far from being proud, as I on one occasion found her very dexterously passing a warm flat-iron over a neat and well-bleached chemisette. A few pleasant evenings were passed at that house, and I must acknowledge forgetting all about my schoolfellow's kind and tender message!

Before finally saying adieu to the straits, in which we have passed a most glorious three months, I must conclude with an incident that occurred which must have astonished the numbers of natives who had come alongside to say good-bye before our final departure. We were all assembled in the gangways, ports, nettings, and chains, during the dinner-hour, which was generally appropriated for bartering. Sail made, and ready to start the moment a breeze sprung up, we were chatting, joking, and exchanging goods with the natives. Two of ours, who were in the gangway port, attracted most attention, as their goods were "in the market" (beads and fish-hooks). During their eagerness to obtain an article they had purchased, one slipped his foot, and accidentally passing his arm across the other's head, to save himself, knocked his cap off into the canoe—*his wig was in it!* Such a roar, such a scream, never was heard; they all concluded he was "scalped"; and it was some time before they were composed, and settled alongside again, when they saw the "scalp" replaced. They

understand "scalping," and it is practised at no great distance from them ; but never having seen a wig, concluded we were as expert as themselves ; it caused much amusement and astonishment. This was our *finalé*; and having sailed for San Francisco, arrived safe, passing over the bar with a slashing breeze, without dipping our "quarter-boats in the water," as we were led to suppose we should do. Two vessels of war were lying here, Russian and American.

"THE CRUISE OF THE CUTTER."

During the period that the ship remained in the straits of Juan de Fuca, a boat expedition started for the Oregon coast, and as many interesting occurrences took place during this cruise, I must devote a leaf or two to them.

The day the boats started was beautiful—beautiful almost beyond description ; no fog clouded the atmosphere ; no winds agitated this lovely branch of the Pacific ; the sun peeped occasionally between small patches of cloud, lending a shade here and there, both to the waters and to the rich foliage, quite charming.

The ship lay still and motionless ; a more than usual number of canoes visited from various parts ; in one, the largest, measuring forty-nine feet seven inches, could be seen a "Taihe" (chief) of Neah bartering a quantity of shells for a Callum female, who was no doubt to become *one* of his wives (he had already two with him) ; in another, a mother, carefully wandering over her children's heads, pulling many very objectionable things out of them, an amusement they delight in when they