THE BOOK *OF* GALLANT VAGABONDS

By
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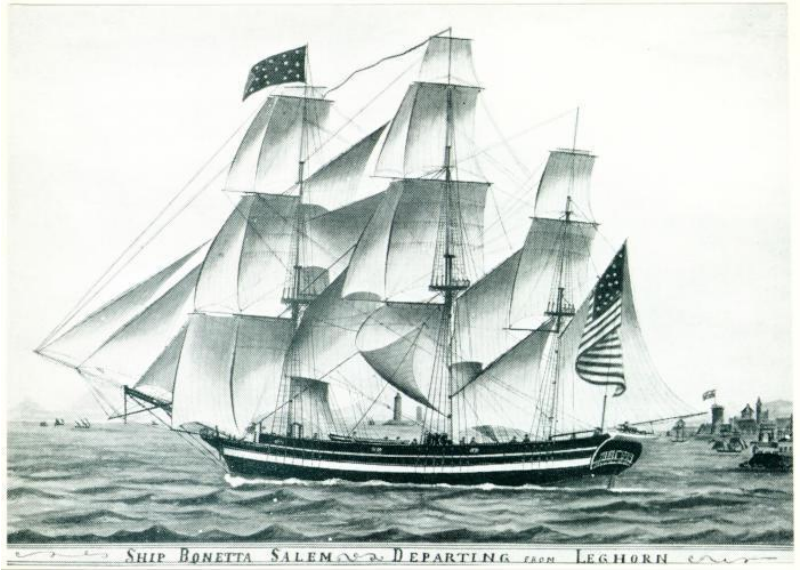

SHIP BONETTA SALEM DEPARTING FROM LEGHORN

Courtesy Peabody Museum, Salem, Massachusetts.

THE HARBOR OF LEGHORN IN SHELLEY'S DAY SHOWING THE AMERICAN SHIP "BONETTA" OF SALEM LEAVING PORT.

To

COLONEL THEODORE ROOSEVELT

and

MRS. THEODORE ROOSEVELT

IN GRATEFUL APPRECIATION OF
MANY YEARS OF FRIENDSHIP
AND ENCOURAGEMENT

FOREWORD

"The wide seas and the mountains called to him,
And grey dawn saw his camp-fires in the rain."

There are times when everyone wants to be a vagabond, and go down the road to adventure, strange peoples, the mountains, and the sea. The bonds of convention, however, are many and strong, and only a few ever break them and go.

In this book I have gathered together the strange and romantic lives of actual wanderers who did what so many have wished to do; here are some who gave up all to go and see the world. The booming of temple gongs over the rice fields sounded in their ears, they tasted strange food cooked on charcoal fires in the twilight quiet of midocean isles, they knew the mountain wind keen with the smell of snow, the mystery of roads along great rivers, and the broad path of ships on lonely seas. Whatever was to be seen, they went to see; they did things the world thought could not be done.

Life is a kind of book which is put into our hands with many pages still uncut; some are content with the open leaves, others cut a few pages, the vagabond reads the whole book if he can.

I have called these wanderers "Gallant Vagabonds" to separate them from both the professional travellers and the vagabond ne'er-do-wells. The gallant vagabond is not the man with the sun helmet and the file of native bearers; nor is he the wastrel who drifts down-stream and sees the world as he goes; the real prince of vagabonds is the wayfarer with scarce a penny in his pocket who fights his way upstream to see where the river rises, and crosses

the dark mountains to find the fabled town. His curiosity is never purely geographical, it lies in the whole fantastic mystery of life.

The true gallant vagabond is one of the heroes of humanity, and history owes him many of her great discoveries, many of her most spirited and romantic episodes.

Here you will find, gathered in their own vagabond company, John Ledyard the runaway college sophomore who thought of walking round the world, Belzoni the monk who became an acrobat and then an archæologist, Edward John Trelawny, the deserter, pirate, and country gentleman who came so mysteriously into the life of Shelley; Thomas Morton, the jovial Elizabethan who scandalized the New England Puritans with a Mayday revel, Arthur Rimbaud the poet who became an African trader, and James Bruce the sturdy Scot who rose to be a great lord in Abyssinia. The accounts are authentic, and if they seem like fiction, the reader must call to mind the old adage about the strangeness of the truth.

I wish to thank Mr. John Farrar, Editor of *The Bookman*, for the kindest of help and encouragement, and I welcome this same opportunity to thank Mr. Warren Butler of Salem, Massachusetts, who found me the old print of the ship *Bonetta*.

H. B.

New York City.

One: JOHN LEDYARD

One: JOHN LEDYARD

I

Here was a man who was born with two great gifts, one the most precious in the world, the other the most perilous. The first was an abounding physical vitality which made the casual business of being alive a divine adventure, the second, an imagination of the sort which refuses discipline and runs away with the whole mind.

The adventure begins in the spring of the year 1772 with the farmers of the Connecticut Valley halting their ploughs in the furrow, and straightening up to stare at a certain extraordinary vehicle going north on the river road. This vehicle was nothing less than a two-wheeled sulky, then a rig almost unheard of outside the towns, and one never known to be used by travellers. A sulky with bundle baggage lashed behind, surely the driver must be an odd kind of rogue! Stopping at nightfall at a farm, the stranger met with close scrutiny by rural candle light. He was a fair-haired youth an inch or so under six feet tall, and of that "rangy" and powerful build which is as characteristic of American soil as Indian corn. His eyes, which were well spaced in a wide forehead, were grey-blue in color, he had a good chin to face the world with, and something of a lean and eagle-ish nose. His name, he said, was John Ledyard, and he was on his way to become a missionary to the Indians.

This youth, John Ledyard, third of his name, had seen the light of day in the village of Groton, Connecticut; his father, a sea captain, had died young; legal mischance or a descent of harpy relatives

had deprived the young mother of her property, and John had been brought up in the house of his grandfather at Hartford. Then had come years at grammar school, the death of his grandfather, his virtual adoption by an uncle and aunt, and the attempt of these good folk to make a lawyer of him, which experiment had not been a success.

At twenty-one years of age, John presented something of a problem to his kinsmen. What was to be done with this great fair-haired youth who had neither money nor influential friends? Suddenly Destiny came down the Connecticut Valley with a letter.

JOHN LEDYARD
Courtesy Judge John A. Aiken.

The Reverend Eleazar Wheelock, founder of Dartmouth, wrote to John inviting him to the college. The passion of this good man's life was the evangelization of the dispossessed and incorrigible redskins; he visited them in their forlorn and dwindling encampments; he took their young men to be his pupils, and he had founded his college largely for the sake of training the sons of colonists to be Indian missionaries. Good Doctor Wheelock had

been a friend of grandfather Ledyard's, and something or other had recalled to his mind the fair-haired boy who he had seen playing about the old man's house at Hartford. He would make a missionary of the lad, and send him forth to comfort the copper-skinned of the elect. A letter arrived offering John the status of a free pupil destined to the Indian field. Sulky and ancient nag were presently produced from somewhere, perhaps from John's own pocket, for he had just inherited a tiny legacy; the uncle and aunt waved farewell, a whip cracked in the air, and John and his sulky vanished over the hills and far away.

At Dartmouth College, he liked to act in plays, and clad in robes of Yankee calico, strutted about as the Numidian Prince, Syphax, in Mr. Addison's "Tragedy of Cato." A savour of old-fashioned rhetoric and magniloquence made its way from these plays into John's mind, and coloured his letters and his language all his life. He liked the out-of-doors, and on one occasion induced a group of comrades to climb with him to the top of a neighboring height, and spend the night on evergreen boughs strewn on the floor of deep holes dug in the snow. Doctor Wheelock nodded an enthusiastic consent; he saw in John's adventure fine training in hardship for his future missionaries! Letters of classmates paint Ledyard as restless, impatient of the dry bones of discipline, authoritative on occasion, and more a man with devoted cronies than one largely and carelessly popular. All other Dartmouth memories have faded in the epic glow of the adventurer's flight from his Alma Mater.

He came to college in a sulky, he left it an even more adventurous way. In the spring of 1773, the sound of the axe rings in the Dartmouth woods. Presently comes a shout, a great, crackling crash, and the sound and tremor of a heavy blow upon the earth. John Ledyard and his cronies have just felled a giant pine standing

close by the bank of the Connecticut River. From this log, the homespun undergraduates fashion a dug-out canoe, fifty feet long and three feet wide, a veritable barge of a canoe, and once the digging and hacking is done with, John himself weaves at the stern of the craft a kind of shelter-bower of willow wands. Word passes among the lads to be at the river early in the morning.

The spring in northern New England is no gracious and gradual awakening, it is shy, even timid, of approach, and there are times when the new leaves and petals have quite the air of children who have run out of the house on a winter's day. Then comes a sudden night of warmth and southwest wind, smells of wet earth and the sound of flooded streams fill all the dark, a rushing spirit of fertility shakes the land, and the rising sun reveals a world hurrying on to June. A dangerous spring in a Puritan land, for flesh and spirit are taken unawares, and swept off to the shrines of gods who have never made a covenant with man.

Such a spring it was, as the forest undergraduates gathered at the huge dug-out under the slanting light of early day, and watched their friend carry supplies to his canoe. John first put aboard a provender of dried venison and cornmeal, then a huge bearskin for a coverlet, and last of all two strangely assorted books, a Greek New Testament and the poems of Ovid. The truant Yankee sophomore steps into his canoe. A long halloo, a push all together, and the craft has slid off into the river, which, clear of ice and swollen by a thousand mountain streams, is rushing past their little college and on into the world. The current seizes the canoe; the wet paddle blade flashes in the cool sun; John masters the swirl with his strength and woodsman skill, and the future vagabond disappears on the way to his fantastic destiny. Little does the truant know that in January and February, 1787, a forlorn, penniless but

indomitable traveller will accomplish one of the most amazing feats ever performed by mortal man, a fifteen hundred mile trudge through an unknown country deep in arctic snow and cold, and that the vagabond will be John Ledyard.

The mystery of his truancy remains to puzzle the world. For after all, why had he run away? In abandoning Dartmouth, he had locked behind him the one door to an education which had opened to him in his obscurity. John Ledyard's contemporaries said simply that the spring was racing in his blood, and that the born vagabond had been unable to control a vagabond urge. There is a world of truth in the reply, but not quite all the truth. The present day, with greater historical perspective, will have it that this fair-haired lad was not really a scion of the seaboard generations of transplanted Englishmen, but a son of the new, native-born, and native-minded culture which was springing up in the hearts of Americans during the last half of the eighteenth century. This lad is no spiritual kinsman of harsh and merciless Endecott; his place is with Daniel Boone and the lords of the frontier. But at Dartmouth, the seventeenth century sat in the seat of power, for, intellectually, Wheelock was a contemporary of Cotton Mather; the two dominies would have talked the same Canaanitish jargon, and shared an identical attitude to life. But young John was of different stuff, and, moreover, he was in certain ways, curiously modern. His flight from Dartmouth thus becomes a bit of vagabondage hiding an instinctive recoil, for had he accepted a missionary career, the seventeenth century would have claimed him forever for its own.

Down the Connecticut River floats the log canoe, carrying a young New Englander from theology under Oliver Cromwell to adventure under George the Third.

II

Now came difficulties and explanations, and John cut the knot by going to sea. Four years later, at the end of a voyage, a young American seaman walks the narrow streets of London's "Sailortown." John Ledyard is now twenty-five years old, life has done little with him, and he has done little with life; his friends at home are beginning to regard him as something of a ne'er-do-well, and the pockets of his sailor breeches are emptier than ever.

In "Sailortown" an April sun is shining, the dank smell of the Thames mingles with wood smoke from the hearths, and there is a sound of men's voices and a clink of glasses at the doors of mariner's inns. John steps into a tavern, and hears news which fires his imagination, and sets his blood to racing. Captain James Cook, the great navigator and explorer, is about to make a third voyage to the South Seas, and ships are being prepared and loaded for the expedition. With characteristic audacity, John hurries directly to the Captain at his lodgings in Chelsea Hospital, and boldly requests to be allowed to go. His colonial directness pleases, and John Ledyard walks back to London, no longer an obscure American seaman, but a corporal of His Majesty's Marines attached to Cook's own vessel, the *Discovery*.

The two ships of the expedition, the old *Resolution* and the new *Discovery*, sailed from England on July 12th, 1776, bound for the South Pacific by the Cape of Good Hope.

He was a marine, now, on a British naval vessel; a roving Yankee caught up in the old navy's conventionalised routine. A bugle or a drum tattoo woke him at early dawn as he slept in the low 'tween deck caves where the timbers groaned when the wind freshened in

the night, and the lanterns and the hammocks swung to the listing of the ship; he escaped from the darkness below, the warm, human smell, and the sight of sleepy men and nakedness to the humid deck, the lilac morning, and the vast splendour of the awakening sea; the drill drum beat for him, he heard the shuffle and the tramp of feet, the peremptory order, and, in the silences, the wind in the rigging and the endless, dissolving whisper of alongside foam.

This *Discovery* was the more interesting of the ships. Captain Cook himself was aboard, a man over six feet in height, with brown eyes, a pleasant countenance, and brown hair tied behind. Ledyard often saw the tall figure in great cloak and three-cornered hat standing at the other end of the deck. Perhaps of even greater interest to the ship's company was the Noah's ark farmyard aboard of cattle, sheep, goats, ducks, dogs, horses, cats, pigs, and rabbits, all intended as gifts to estimable savages who had no such allies, for the eighteenth century was nothing if not benevolent. When in port for any length of time, the sea-going bull and the other grazing animals were put ashore for pasturage; at the Cape of Good Hope, a rascally Hottentot delayed the expedition by stealing a salty and intrepid cow. During a stay in the east, this animal world was strengthened by a vast contingent of cockroaches who fell in showers to the deck when the sails were unfurled before getting under way; not a romantic picture, this, but one with a genuine flavor of old sailing ship days. And when all other things wearied, there was a battle to watch, that battle with never a truce which is the sailing of a sailing ship in open sea.

After a pause by the barren rocks of Kerguelen Land in the Antarctic, and after revisiting Tasmania and New Zealand, the expedition sounded its way through the archipelagos of the South

Pacific, and anchored in the bay of Tongataboo in the Friendly Islands. The ships remained there twenty-six days gathering stores.

Tongataboo—the name has a ring of the Bab Ballads; but it hides the memory of a Paradise. John found himself among a people who were beautiful, courteous, and friendly, for no whites had yet poisoned them either with their maladies or their civilization, and there was no tiresome angel with a flaming sword. First of a line of roaring Yankee whalemen and sailors, Corporal John walks the island night under the giant moon, watching the smooth, incoming seas burst and scatter into a churning wash that might be a liquid and greener moonlight; first of American adventurers in the South Seas, John Ledyard hears the endless clatter and dry rustling of the island palms. He lives in a tent ashore, refers to the natives as "the Indians," eats fish baked in plantain leaves, and drinks water from a coconut shell. Late in the golden night, he hears over the faint monotone of the breaking sea, "a number of flutes, beginning almost at the same time, burst from every quarter of the surrounding grove." Not to be outdone in the matter of entertainment, Cook delights the innocent natives with a display of fireworks, a form of entertainment then regarded as the height of the ingenious and the civilized. Surely it was pleasant to be alive when Paradise was young. From the Friendly Islands, the *Discovery* carried John to Hawaii, and thence to the coast whose memory was to shape the greater adventures of his life.

By the last half of the eighteenth century, the one accessible coast of North America which lingered unvisited and unexplored, was the coast of the Pacific North Northwest,—or to be more definite, the shores of northern British Columbia and the great peninsula of Alaska. The geographers of the day were aware that Bering had sighted such a coast, and that the Russians had crossed to it from