

Captain Vancouver's Last Voyage

By AUGUSTUS BRIDLE



IN the celebration of the deeds of great voyageurs, Captain George Vancouver need not be forgotten. The painstaking and rather pious mariner who first explored the Gulf of Georgia and gave Vancouver Island its name did as much for the western coast of America as Champlain and La Salle did for the southern interior of Canada, as Mackenzie and Franklin for the far north, or Simon Fraser for the interior of British Columbia.

Three quaint old leather-bound volumes printed with the old-style letter "s" and illustrated by curious archaic wood cuts, tell the story of the long round-the-world trip that took four years of the last seven of Captain Vancouver's life. These volumes were a substantial part of the evidence at the Alaska Tribunal when the boundaries of Canada were under scrutiny. The Captain died before he had finished the work, leaving it to his brother John.

Vancouver made his memorable voyage between the first of April, 1791, and the early part of 1795. Somewhat less than half this time was spent on the western coast of America; the rest at the Sandwich and other Pacific islands, and Australia and New Zealand, and on the way over the high seas. Vancouver went by way of the Cape of Good Hope; he returned via Cape Horn; so that in this trip he went clear round the globe as far as a mariner was able to go—a thing which twice before he had almost done when accompanying Captain Cook.

Captain Vancouver was commissioned by His Majesty George III., who had lately lost his subjects in the eastern part of America, to see what sort of land might be the west coast, of which no one as yet knew anything in particular—the southern part of the continent belonging to Spain whose missionaries had done some travelling along the north-western coast. Besides, it was thought by Vancouver that he might find an eastward passage to the interior great lakes. He had heard of the

journeys of Champlain and of La Salle, the former of whom thought he might follow the great lake system to China, and the latter of whom did as much of the journey as any man could do when he traversed the upper lakes, beginning at Lake Erie, where just above Niagara Falls he built the first vessel ever floated on the lakes.

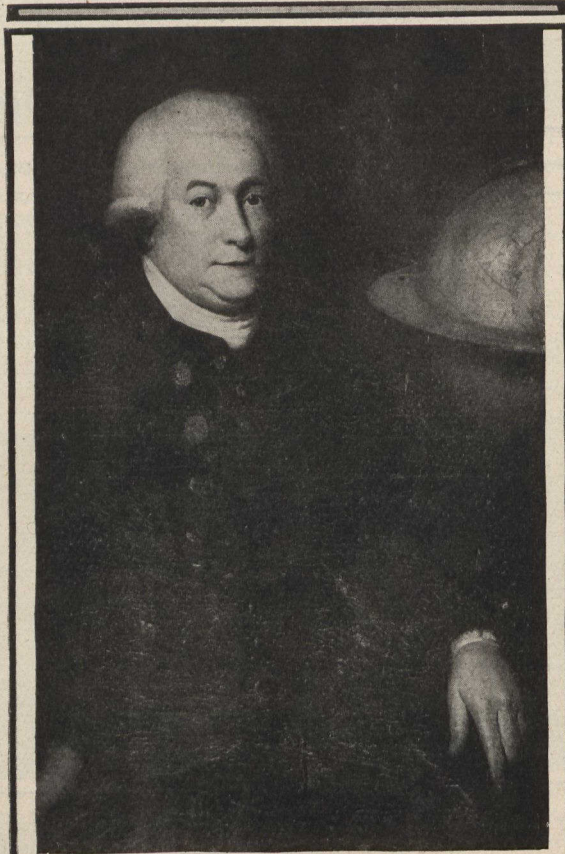
Vancouver seems to have trusted a good deal in God and his imagination; at the same time he

had a scientific mind and he carried with him on this trip with the *Chatham* and the *Discovery* everything a mariner could use in those days for making surveys. The only loss by death on the voyage occurred before the party got well away from Falmouth, when one John Brown, the carpenter's mate, described as "an excellent gentleman," fell overboard.

They set out, as the Captain himself says, "with minds, it may be conjectured, not entirely free from serious and contemplative reflection." In fact the whole crew seem to have been shadowed by pious notions. There was never even a mutiny. One thing the Captain insisted upon—clean ship. While the bill of fare more than once got down to sauerkraut and potato broth, the store-rooms were washed with vinegar and the decks fumigated with a burning mixture of gunpowder and vinegar, and he himself confesses that the smell of this compound was very bad—but never a whimper from his crew.

It was the spring of 1792, just about a year after the beginning of the voyage, that Vancouver's two wooden ships crawled up through Puget Sound—named after one of the crew—and past Mount Baker, christened after the third lieutenant. The Indians in these regions he describes very intelligently. None of them were able to speak the Nootka language, however, so that the Captain was at a loss to know what sort of savages they might be. Here a village and there a canoe, the natives offered to trade skins and meat for knick-knacks; and in one case they offered a good-looking child for a chunk of copper, of which the Captain had plenty; but he indignantly refused and gave the pagans some very pious advice about citizenship.

His description of how the crew got to work as soon as they landed is a marvel of industry. Apparently the crews were so glad to get on shore that they fairly devoured the work. They went making and mending sails, inspecting calks, cutting wood, brewing spruce beer—a delightful concoction!—repairing the rigging, stocking up the commissariat, cleaning out holds and loading in gravel ballast and stopping leaks—every man as busy as a beaver and



IN THE CEMETERY
ADJOINING THIS CHURCH
WERE INTERRED, IN THE YEAR 1798,
THE MORTAL REMAINS OF
CAPTAIN GEORGE VANCOUVER, R.N.
WHOSE VALUABLE AND ENTERPRISING
VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY
TO THE NORTH PACIFIC OCEAN,
AND
ROUND THE WORLD
DURING FIVE YEARS OF LABORIOUS SURVEY,
ADDED GREATLY
TO THE GEOGRAPHICAL KNOWLEDGE
OF HIS COUNTRYMEN
TO THE MEMORY
OF THAT CELEBRATED NAVIGATOR
THIS MONUMENTAL TABLET
IS ERECTED BY
THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY.

