TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

THIS TRANSLATION of an abridged version of La Pérouse's report of his "Voyage Around the World" has been made in the belief that the fame of Admiral Jean-François Galaup, Comte de La Pérouse, has been unduly eclipsed by that of Captain James Cook, R.N. As Pacific explorer par excellence, Cook rightly deserves to head the list of the eighteenth-century explorers who corrected the errors of their predecessors and filled in the many blank spaces on the map of the Pacific Ocean. Cook's career has been the subject of numerous books in English, and in the various historical works and text books considerable attention has been given to his accomplishments.

Second only to Cook, and the foremost French explorer of the Pacific in the eighteenth century, La Pérouse is virtually unknown in the United States outside of esoteric circles.¹ Almost completely ignored by American writers in the nineteenth century, he received little notice until 1959, when two works dealing with his expedition were published.² The same hiatus exists in our general periodical literature.

¹ See Percy Sykes, *A History of Exploration* (New York: Harper Bros., 1961), which contains a chapter on Cook and a paragraph on La Pérouse.

² Charles N. Rudkin, *The First French Expedition to California: La Pérouse in 1786* (Los Angeles: Glen Dawson, 1959); Edward Weber Allen, *The Vanishing Frenchman: The Mysterious Disappearance of Lapérouse* (Rutland, Vt.: C. E. Tuttle, Co., 1959).

This indifference can be explained partly by the fact that the expedition of La Pérouse was terminated the year before the French Revolution began. The search for La Pérouse which was conducted by d'Entrecasteaux ended in the same year which saw the start of the War of the First Coalition. The official publication of the report of La Pérouse's voyage appeared in 1797, shortly before the War of the Second Coalition. World conditions at the time of the French Revolution and Napoleon were not conducive to spreading the fame of La Pérouse in the English-speaking world.

Furthermore, even if those years had been peaceful, the mere fact that the original reports and most of the subsequent literature on La Pérouse were in the French language militated against the spread of La Pérouse's reputation in the United States. Combine the linguistic factor with the natural long-term cultural orientation of the United States toward English history and literature rather than to the French, and we have gone a long way toward explaining why Cook has all but monopolized the pages which tell of the exploration of the Pacific in the eighteenth century.

Nevertheless, a number of English editions of La Pérouse's reports have been published; most of them made their appearance shortly after the French edition was first published in 1797. There was at least one American edition, an abridgment issued in 1801.³

The title of the original French edition, *Voyage de La Pérouse autour du Monde*, is misleading since La Pérouse did not circumnavigate the world. Rather, he sailed the length and breadth of the Pacific, crossing it from south to north, from east to west, and again from north to south. In the course of his travels, he stopped at Chile, Alaska, California, Macao, Manila, Siberia, Sakhalin Island, Kamchatka, and Australia, as well as at numerous islands in Oceania.

The purpose of the expedition, which was sent out by the government of Louis XVI, was the advancement of science and the promotion of French foreign trade. In carrying out the first of these objectives, La Pérouse sent

³ *A Voyage Round the World, Performed in the Years 1785, 1786, 1787, 1788, by M. de la Pérouse: Abridged from the Original French Journal . . .* Boston, printed for Joseph Bumstead, 1801.

back to Europe the most comprehensive description to date of Sakhalin Island and the Siberian coast opposite it. His principal discovery was of the strait which separates Sakhalin Island and Hokkaido and connects the Sea of Japan with the southern part of the Okhotsk Sea. His reports include detailed, accurate observations of the natives of Siberia, Sakhalin Island, Alaska, and Oceania, thereby providing stimulating material for the newly developing science of anthropology. The scientists who accompanied him gathered data which promoted all of the natural sciences, particularly astronomy, botany, geography, geology, meteorology, oceanography, and zoology. The expedition had the opportunity to correct and supplement various observations made by Captain Cook's party a few years earlier.

Although the climate and natural beauty of some of the islands of Oceania impressed the expedition so favorably that they were described as a paradise, La Pérouse did not subscribe to the myth of the "noble savage" popular in the French Enlightenment. Rather, his reports helped to dispel the romantic fallacy which had beguiled such sedentary intellectuals as Diderot and Rousseau. In his humane attitude toward the natives, however, La Pérouse exemplified one of the better trends of the Enlightenment.

La Pérouse's reports are of interest not only to specialists in the history of eighteenth-century France and the exploration of the Pacific, but also to general readers in the United States. The attention of the American public has been increasingly turned toward the Pacific and westward across its vast expanses to the shores of the Far East. Since 1784, when the *Empress of China* first sailed from Boston to Canton, until the latest arrival of a tourist-laden luxury liner at Suva, from the first colonization of Hawaii by New England missionaries in 1820 to the assignment of Micronesia to the United States as a strategic trusteeship, the Pacific has played an increasingly greater role in the lives of Americans. This trend has been accompanied by a corresponding growth of Pacific studies and literature, in which, it is believed, the epic of La Pérouse deserves a more prominent place.

As stated above, the original report of La Pérouse's expedition was first published in Paris in 1797. The three volumes of this edition were condensed into one small volume by F. Valentin in about 1840 and published

by Alfred Mame and Sons, Tours. In producing a more readable version of the original report, Valentin omitted technical data, shortened the descriptive passages, and changed the narrative from the first person to the third. The present translation is of the fourteenth edition of Valentin's abridgment, which was published in 1875 and includes a supplement consisting of notes from the journal of Dr. Rollin, ship's surgeon, and an appendix describing the efforts made to solve the mystery of the disappearance of La Pérouse's expedition.

The questions of nomenclature, to quote J. C. Beaglehole, are somewhat troublesome. Some of the places visited by La Pérouse, in particular the islands, no longer have the names by which they were known to eighteenth-century Europeans. Each of the various European nations had the habit of giving a different name to the same place, usually out of national pride. This translation retains the original place names used by La Pérouse, and where these are substantially different from the present ones, the modern equivalent has been inserted in brackets immediately following the first mention of the name.

Footnotes marked Valentin are those of the French abridgment. All other footnotes are mine.

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