*A SAILOR JOHNSON LOVED**

'THE name Burney,' Hazlitt once said, 'is a pass-port to the Temple of Fame. Those who bear it, wits, scholars, novelists, musicians, artists, are by birthright free of Parnassus.' And the Burneys were full as loveable as they were cultured. 'I love all that breed,' cried Dr. Johnson, 'and I love them because they love each other.'

Now of books about the Burneys there have been of recent years no end. Most of them, of course, are concerned with Madame D'Arblay, from Austin Dobson's splendid edition of her *Diary* to the entertaining gossip of Hill and Seeley. And her father, Dr. Burney, and her brother Charles, the great Greek scholar, and her sisters, have not passed unnoticed. Yet, until this present time, one hundred and ten years after his death, no one had thought of writing the Life of her sailor-brother James. He has had, indeed, to wait long for his Biography, but perhaps happily, for now that it has come at last it is an ideal one, graphic in style and based on much hitherto unpublished matter, altogether worthy of a man whose career was a romance and who is the connecting link between the great Johnsonian Circle and that other very different coterie of which Charles Lamb was the shining light.

This sailor Burney in his youth was a prime favourite of Dr. Johnson's. 'I question,' the latter would say, 'if any ship upon the ocean goes out attended with more good wishes than that which carries the fate of Burney.' The Doctor was for ever mar-

* MY FRIEND THE ADMIRAL. The Life, Letters and Journals of Rear-Admiral James Burney, F.R.S. By G. E. Manwaring. (London; Routledge, 1931; cloth, 12/6 net.)

velling at the amiability and gentleness of one who had lived so long in savage and even cannibal lands, and with rough sea-faring men such as those portrayed in the glowing pages of Smollett; and although Johnson had a real horror of ships ('being in a ship is being in a jail, sir, with the chance of being drowned'), he nerved himself to go over Burney's when it dropped anchor at Deptford. Nigh forty years after Johnson had passed away, the same sailor Burney was the loved and constant companion of the author of *Elia*, and the associate of Southey and Hazlitt, Crabb Robinson and Leigh Hunt. And in between, among his many and varied activities, he was the right-hand man of Captain James Cook, and the historian and almost the witness of his terrible death in the South Sea Islands.

James Burney was born in 1750, the eldest son of the celebrated Dr. Charles Burney, the author of the *History of Music*. He had a brief schooling at King's Lynn Grammar School, and his master was none other than Eugene Aram. The boy never forgot that loved and gentle teacher, and his first vivid and terrible memory was of the August night in 1758, when:

> Two stern-faced men set out from Lynn,
> Through the cold and heavy mist;
> And Eugene Aram walked between
> With gyves upon his wrist.

When only ten years old, Burney entered the Navy, just then playing its conspicuous part under Hawke in the Seven Years War. A midshipman at nineteen, and almost ready for his lieutenant's certificate, he spent (for experience sake, and quite in accord with custom) twelve months on a merchant vessel, going a voyage to Bombay on an East Indiaman. His character at this time is depicted for us by Madame D'Arblay in her *Early Diaries* as 'honest, generous, sensible, unpolished, careless and good-natured, full of

humour, mirth and jollity. A worthy, deserving creature.' But he had his serious side, he was somewhat of a thinker and a scholar, he read a good deal and studied mathematics hard.

James Burney came home for his twenty-first birthday, and was just in time to see the arrival in the Downs of Cook and his famous *Endeavour*. And that memorable sight decided his career. Fired with a passion for maritime adventure and discovery, he brought great influences to bear, and so obtained permission from the Admiralty to take part in Captain Cook's second expedition, then fitting out for Australia, New Zealand, and the South Pole. He was gazetted to the *Resolution*, and set sail on April 9th, 1772. Transferred at the Cape of Good Hope to the *Adventure* as Second Lieutenant, he began to keep a journal, still existing, which is a valuable supplement to Cook's official account. Copious extracts are given in his Biography, and he seems to have vied with his famous sister Fanny in his power of vivid dramatic description. After recounting his adventures in the Ice Islands of the Antarctic, he gives us, at great length, what is perhaps the first full account of Tasmania and its aborigines, and then has much to say of New Zealand and the Maoris. Proceeding to the South Seas, and visiting numerous islands there, he narrowly escaped falling into the hands of cannibals. Some of his shipmates were not so fortunate, but were roasted and eaten, and an exciting story is told of this mishap, and the subsequent discovery of the remains of the poor victims.

At the end of two years, the Expedition was back in England, having suffered great hardships, though not without achieving valuable results. It brought with it from the Society Islands a young native called Omai, whose name figures in every book and memoir of the late eighteenth century, and who has been im-

mortalised not only by the canvas of Sir Joshua Reynolds, but also in the well-known lines of Cowper :

> O, gentle savage ! whom no love of thee
> Or thine, but curiosity perhaps,
> Or else vain-glory, prompted us to draw
> Forth from thy native bow'rs, to show thee here
> With what superior skill we can abuse
> The gifts of Providence, and squander life.

It fell to the lot of Burney to be his guide, philosopher and friend, and to introduce him to civilized life. And well did he do his work. Omai became the ' rage.' He was one of the attractions of the London season, the lion of lions in every drawing-room and *salon*. James Burney, who had learned the Otaheitan language, interpreted for him, taught him English and good manners, and went with him everywhere. Lord Sandwich, the head of the Admiralty, entertained them for a week at Hinchinbrooke, while Omai also witnessed the opening of Parliament and was received in audience by King George III. The Burneys gave a dinner in his honour. One of the best-known passages in Madame D'Arblay describes it. With her Boswell-like touch she makes the scene live for us—the ' gentle savage ' with his fine bows and polite ways and broken English, his surprisingly excellent table manners, his coach and his man-servant, his taste in drinks (hesitating between porter and small beer), his tall graceful form and dark pleasing face, and his smart attire (he had just come from the King), velvet suit, lace ruffles, and sword. And she contrasts the natural grace and refinement of the poor South Sea Islander, with young Stanhope, the great Lord Chesterfield's son, who in spite of his father's letters of instruction and the finest education in the world, was but ' a mere pedantic booby ' beside him.

Captain Cook and Burney, in the former's third and last voyage, took Omai back to the South Seas,

and he was of the greatest service to them as guide, orator, and interpreter. They eventually settled him in an island of his choice, where the ship's carpenters built him a house. He was given horses and goats, knives, tools and furniture, and had a great store of presents brought from England. Captain Cook threatened the Chiefs of the island with his high displeasure if they dared to molest Omai, and as a potent charm inscribed over the door of the little hut his own name and the still more illustrious one of 'Georgius III Rex,' and so, after a farewell dinner, they left, and this strange incident ended. Poor Omai did not last very long. Next time a British ship came that way he was dead.

To return to James Burney. In 1774, as a First Lieutenant of the *Cerberus*, he played a part in the War with the American Colonies, his chief duty being to intercept the privateers which swarmed along the coasts. But from this not very congenial task he was recalled by the Admiralty to accompany Cook on his last fatal expedition. In this he had as brother officers in the *Discovery* several men of distinction and scientific training, notably Bligh and Vancouver. Their instructions were to find a passage eastwards from the Northern Pacific to the Atlantic. For the next four years Burney again kept a valuable journal, hitherto unpublished, and his Biographer makes full use of it. He starts off with a list of the ship's stores, including the articles of barter destined for the natives, more especially knives and axes, beads, red baize and nails, of which last they took out three hundred and fifty hundredweight supplied from Birmingham. Burney's account not only of Australia, Tasmania, New Zealand and the South Sea Isles, but also of Alaska and the frozen North, is most interesting; and he abounds in anecdotes and keen observation of nature and of man. But the part of his long Diary to which most readers

will turn is that which deals with the oft-told tale of the death of Captain Cook. It is a detailed and authoritative version, and throws new light on the subject. The thrilling story is told by Burney in his most vivid style, and occupies many of his best pages. He himself was subsequently in command of the party which found and obtained the body of the murdered hero.

Home again, and now, with Captain's rank, he soon received a command, and set out on fresh service. England was then at war with France, Spain and Holland, as well as with the revolted colonies in America, and Burney took part in various expeditions. His last efforts were in India, where his squadron co-operated in the struggle with Tippoo-Sahib.

But this was the end of his active service. We can touch but lightly on his life as a half-pay officer. It was by no means an idle one. A happy marriage, a keen interest in the trial of his friend Warren Hastings (he figured largely and amusingly as a sort of *enfant terrible* in Madame d'Arblay's historic account of that memorable scene), his ardent friendship with the Lambs and their Circle, and his very considerable literary labours, kept him well occupied when on the reserve list. His *History of the Discoveries in the South Seas* won him great renown. He followed it up with other valuable works on the early Russian navigators, and the American Buccaneers, issued astronomical pamphlets, contributed to quarterlies, read papers before learned societies and was honoured with the distinction of F.R.S. And he wrote a standard book on Whist, of which he was an expert player. But he was strangely neglected by the Admiralty (perhaps because he was such a very blunt and outspoken critic), and did not receive his long overdue promotion to the rank of Rear-Admiral until four months before his death in 1821.

James Burney's Life was one well worth writing. Not a great man, perhaps, not in the first rank, but assuredly a fine character and a loveable one. Pope's familiar lines fit him admirably:

> Of manners gentle, of affections mild,
> In wit a man; simplicity a child;
> A safe companion, and an easy friend,
> Unblamed through life, lamented in thy end.

ROBERT BRACEY, O.P.