

[JAMES CHOYCE]
A
NARRATIVE OF
SOME
ADVENTURES VOYAGES AND TRAVELS
IN VARIOUS PARTS OF THE WORLD
BY
A BRITISH MARRINER
WRITTEN BY HIMSELF
1825

These memoirs cover the years 1793 to 1823, during which time the writer endured more adventures than usually come to a dozen men in a similar period. The title page as transcribed above contains no mention of James Choyce as the author. However the signature 'James Choyce' is faintly visible in ink on the front endpaper and Mr C. R. H. Taylor, when Chief Librarian, established in 1937 that James Choyce appears in a muster book (P.R.O. Ad. 37/1189) where he is shown as having joined the *Theseus* off Lorient from a French prison, an event he describes in the narrative. I discuss this point later with other evidence of the authenticity of his reminiscences.

Choyce left home at the age of sixteen, in 1793, and apprenticed himself in the Southern Whale Fishery. Nominally an able-seaman on various whaling ships plying in Caribbean waters and along the west coast of South America where he saw and described such fabulous creatures as terrapins and flamingoes, he dwells, in the memoirs, mainly on his adventures on land as a rather unruly prisoner-of-war, first of the Spanish and then of the French.

On his second voyage – in the *Lydia* – he and his shipmates were all taken prisoner by surprise by the Governor of Payta, Peru, upon the latter's receiving news of the declaration of war between Spain and England, early in 1797.

For the next four years he was trundled around the Peruvian countryside from jail to jail with his comrades, most of whom he describes as continuously under the bad influence of 'aquadiente'. This method of travel around Peru was strange and rather frightening for the Englishmen: 'After sunset that same Evening they mounted us on Mules and tied our Legs under their Bellies, and guarded by upwards of a Hundred Soldiers we set off on our Land expedition, But as we could not well understand each other, We was at a loss to know what they was going to do with us, For My own part I wishd myself safe out of their Hands. for the Moast of them being Indians and Blacks and wearing a thing like a Striped Blanket with a hole in the Middle which they put their Heads through They appeard to me very quer Beings . . .' At one stage