

The Story of Pitcairn Island

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Out in the Pacific there is an island that time forgot.

A little over two hundred years into the past will bring us to it. For there we shall find one of the most fascinating adventures of all time.

Far out in the Pacific Ocean, on the outer edge of the Tuamotu Archipelago, at Latitude 25°5' S. and Longitude 13°5' W., is a green paradise known as Pitcairn Island. About two miles long and one mile wide, it is ringed with a rugged coast of cliffs; and, within their protecting care, is nestled rich, fertile soil, the mild climate and lush tropical fruit that makes the South Pacific Isles so famous.

But there is more to this little island than its location or its climate. For here is to be found the rendezvous of one of the most amazing stories in all sailing history.

Our story actually begins on July 2, 1767, when a midshipman climbed the ship's masthead, of the *Swallow*, and called out, "Land ahoy!" He had sighted a previously unknown island. Philip Carteret, captain of this British sailing ship, in the midst of a voyage around the world, carefully checked through his charts and, not finding the island listed, recorded its longitude and latitude and named it in honor of the midshipman that first spotted it. He wrote down the name, "Pitcairn"; and, in his ship's log, he said that it was about three thousand miles west of Chile. "It was like a great rock rising from the sea," he wrote, "about five miles round, apparently uninhabited, with trees on it, and a stream of water running down one side. The surf, breaking upon the rocks, rendered landing difficult. After examining it from the ship, I called it 'Pitcairn Island,' in honor of my midshipman, and sailed on."

What Captain Philip Carteret wrote in his log actually told a lot. The

island was uninhabited, and it had water and soil. If he had not mentioned this, the little island probably would never have entered history in the surprising way that it did.

But now, let us go on with the story. It is the year 1777, and the British government is planning to send an expedition to the South Pacific. Early explorers of the Pacific, such as William Dampier and George Anson, had brought back to Europe fascinating tales of the South Pacific islands and its peoples. One food that they particularly mentioned was the breadfruit. Later, Captain Cook, following his trans-world voyage, also commented on the breadfruit plant. He told of its very fine qualities, declared that it was the staple diet of the Pacific islanders, and that they were able to obtain it for eight months out of the year.

In 1777, the Royal Society of Arts, in London, England, offered a gold medal to whoever should succeed in transplanting the breadfruit to the West Indies, in order to help feed the workers on the sugar plantations there. King George III, recently defeated in a war to retain possession of the American Colonies, now had the opportunity to give his thoughts to some other part of the world. And so the British Admiralty was given permission to fit out a ship that would win the gold medal. Its destination was Tahiti. There it was, to collect a supply of young plants of the breadfruit and carry them to the West Indies, in the Gulf of Mexico.

It was recognized that this would be a unique voyage, and the attention of all Europe was upon it. One of the best merchant ships obtainable was purchased by the Naval Board for this purpose—the *Bethia*. It was renamed the *Bounty*, and Lieutenant William Bligh was given command of the vessel.

Bligh was a short man, small-featured, about thirty-three years old.

Naval historians tell us he was not a man to inspire love. He is variously described as irritable, truculent, overbearing, and a driver rather than a leader of men. But, in those days, such qualities would not rule him out, for he knew how to command the men that manned the ships.

Forty-five men, between the ages of seventeen and forty, were signed on as crewmen. Instead of exploring new lands or engaging in conquest, this expedition was designed to promote good will and to exchange colonial benefits and, therefore, the crew was carefully selected.

As the officer, second in command, twenty-two year old Fletcher Christian was chosen. Christian was a man highly regarded in the admiralty, and was generally conceded to be one who would rise high in naval rank. He had earlier been a particular friend of Captain Bligh; and, so, by special request, he was asked to join the ship's company as its chief officer. He had accompanied Bligh on two earlier voyages, and was highly regarded by him.

But something went wrong this time. Something had happened to Bligh.

The three midshipmen were Peter Heywood, Edward Young, and George Stewart. They also were looking forward to higher positions in the British Navy. But little did any of them know that only one would ever return to England again. This was Peter Heywood; and his story of pardon from execution, as a result of his sister's devotion and prayers, is something of an epoch in British naval history. Of the rest of the crew, little is known until we learn of them later in the unfolding of the story of the *Bounty*.

Later in the afternoon of the twenty-third of December, 1787, the *Bounty* weighed anchor and slowly headed down the River Thames. One of the best-known voyages, in the history of England, had begun.

Crossing the Atlantic and traveling down the coast of South America, the *Bounty* headed toward the Horn,—the southern tip of the continent—planning to round it and sail into the Pacific. But, at the Horn, it encountered such fierce storms that Bligh feared that the ship might be lost. In his later report, this part of the voyage is quoted from his log: “Repeated gales seem now to become more violent, the squalls so excessively severe that I dare scarce show any canvas to it. The motion of the ship is so very quick and falls so steep between the seas that it is impossible to stand without man ropes across the decks.”

So fierce did the weather become that Bligh was forced to turn back,—and head east—and sailing more than three quarters of the way around the world in the other direction, by way of Africa, through the Indian Ocean and past Australia. He was not to drop anchor in Tahiti until October 26, 1788. In ten months he had sailed over twenty-seven thousand miles.

And what those months and miles had brought to all concerned was something of a nightmare.

Lack of food, close quarters, poor water, difficult conditions, bad weather, and seemingly endless months put a severe strain on the nerves and temper of everyone on board. But the breaking point was the quarter-deck tactics of Bligh, combined with the short rations he gave the men.

The problem was that Bligh was not only the Master of the ship, he was also the Purser—its treasurer. It was later said that his excessive economy with the food brought on most of the problems. It has been suggested that the short allowances were doled out to his own advantage.

A ringleader, in the growing resentment, was Matthew Quintal. He smoldered with resentment; for he was the first to be “flogged” by Bligh for reported insolence and contempt, and given two dozen lashes. James Morrison, a fellow shipmate, later declared before the Court of Enquiry, upon his return to England, that all that Quintal had done was to complain about the unnecessary cutting down of the regular food

allowances.

On another occasion, Bligh ordered a supply of cheese to be brought up on deck and aired. When the cooper (the one in charge of the barrels) opened one of the casks, Bligh declared that two of the cheeses were missing. “They must have been stolen,” he thundered.

Quietly the cooper reminded him that the cask had been opened while the ship was still lying in the Thames River, and that by order of Mr. Samuel, the clerk, the cheeses had been sent to Captain Bligh’s home. At this, Fletcher Christian stepped forward and politely gave supporting evidence to this fact.

Cutting short all further discussion, Bligh ordered the cheese ration stopped from both officers and men until the man who had taken the cheeses returned them. Speaking violently to the cooper, he swore at him and declared he would be flogged if anything further was said about the incident.

After ten months of this—the ship finally laid anchor in Matava Lagoon. A nightmare was behind them and what appeared, to their weary eyes to be paradise lay before them. They had arrived at the warm and friendly land of Tahiti.

We are told that the natives of the island showered hospitality upon Captain Bligh and the crew of the *Bounty*. Gone were the routine and the strain of ship life. Now there was work to do on the island, preparing breadfruit plants for shipment to the West Indies. There was time for relaxation. And especially so, since we are told that Nelson, the ship’s botanist, and Brown, the gardener, did most of the slipping and potting of the 1,015 breadfruit plants that were gradually taken on board the ship and stored in the hold, in a special room earlier prepared to receive them.

No one knows why the captain decided to remain so long in Tahiti—from October 26, 1788 to April 4, 1789—but it did little to lessen the final clash of wills.

When the day came to depart, it was hard to say good-bye. But, at last, the men boarded the ship again, and

bade farewell to their happy life of many months. None aboard had any idea that, within twenty-three days, a mutiny would take place—a mutiny that would affect every man on board for the remainder of his life.

Slowly the ship was towed out into the sea by large native canoes, and then, setting sail, the ship slowly headed west toward the Indian Ocean. All prepared for another long, wearisome journey. And it was quick to begin. Two or three days after embarking, Captain Bligh confiscated all the food that had been given as presents, to the crewmen, by their many friends back in Tahiti. To this Christian objected. Bligh immediately retorted with an outpouring of foul and sarcastic language. To this, Christian replied, “Sir, your abuse is so bad that I cannot do my duty with any pleasure.”

Christian had been warned by Bligh not to use arms against the natives, and so, two weeks later, when the *Bounty* stopped at the Island of Anamooka for water and were repulsed by unfriendly natives, Christian returned to the ship without firing on them. At this, Bligh swore at him and called him a coward for not attacking them. The breach between the two men was widening.

Three days later, while still in the Tonga group of islands, the episode occurred that was the direct forerunner of the mutiny. On the afternoon of the 27th of April, Bligh came up on the quarter-deck and discovered that some coconuts were missing from a pile stored between the guns. In a storm of anger, he declared they had been stolen—and with the knowledge of the other ship’s officers. To this, they replied that they had not seen anyone touch them. (These were Bligh’s own coconuts; the officers and men had theirs in their own rooms below deck).

Turning to Christian, Bligh ordered him to go below and search the officers’ quarters and bring up every coconut to be found. “How many coconuts do you have in your cabin?” he roared at Christian.

“I really do not know, sir,” replied Christian, “but I hope you do not think me guilty of stealing yours.” “Yes,”

Bligh snapped, with an oath, "I do think so,—you are all thieves alike! You will steal my yams next. I will flog you, and make you jump overboard before we reach Endeavor Straits!" He then turned to Mr. Samuel, the ship's clerk (who later reported the incident at the official inquiry back in England), and demanded that he stop "the villains' grog" and give them only half a pound of yams for food the next day. Then turning to the men he declared that, if any more nuts were missing, he would reduce the rations to a quarter pound.

The effect of all this was terrific on Fletcher Christian. There was a growing question in his mind as to what effect all this would have on his service record upon returning to England. What lay ahead? Such thoughts as these were in his mind as evening drew on. He did not know that he was only twenty-four hours from the end of his naval career.

Mutiny on the Bounty

The "Great Enquiry" was destined to become the talk of all England. Indeed, it would become the naval hearing of the decade. Months of careful deliberation and many witnesses were to open up before the British Empire the story of the mutiny on the Bounty.

The Enquiry was to bring London the closest it had ever come to the South Pacific.

But that was to come later. Just now we must return to the Bounty. Of the events that were to rapidly bring the mutiny to a head, John Fryer, the ship's master, was to later give the clearest picture. You can read it in the official "Report of Enquiry" that resulted from this naval hearing.

Fryer tells us that Bligh's "passions were apt to ebb as swiftly as they flowed. An hour or so after he had abused Christian on the afternoon of

the 27th, he sent him an invitation to sup with him that very evening. Christian, however, excused himself, on the pretense of being unwell. The other officers agreed among themselves not to sup with the Commander should he ask them."

By the time the sun began to set on a shoreless horizon the next afternoon, a plan of action was forming in Christian's mind. The calm waters of the Pacific brought no peace to his heart. For he intended to leave the ship that evening. Desertion was his objective. He now saw in Bligh an enemy, and he felt that all hope of future promotion had been destroyed by what had been taking place. What report Bligh might later bring against him back in England, he knew not, but he was sure it would not be good.

Quietly, that evening, he received from the boatswain, the carpenter, and two midshipmen,—the men who were acquainted with his plans,—some supplies to trade with natives for food, when he should later land on some shore. As soon as the opportunity afforded, he planned to be lowered in a boat and leave.

But there seemed to be more activity than the usual that night, and he would have to wait. He must not be seen departing. And so the night deepened, and he retired for sleep. But he had had little of it, when he was called to take over his watch. As the quiet waters lapped against the side of the ship, he leaned against the railing with Matthew Quintal, and he looked beyond the waters to the far distance. Matthew knew what he was planning, and suddenly turning to him, he urged him not to try to leave the ship—but rather to seize it, for there were others, of the ship's crew, who had been abused by "Old Breadfruit," as some of them privately called him.

Immediately Christian acted. He called Isaac Martin, Charles Churchill, and Matthew Thompson, all of whom had tasted "the cat" (the whiplash), and he suggested a plan to them. Alexander Smith also supported it, and he called William McCoy and John Williams who also favored the plot, for they had all received harsh treatment.

The next hour brought a dramatic turn of events.

Christian, accompanied by three others, took the captain by surprise while he was sleeping in his cabin. Dragging him from his bed, they overpowered him and tied his hands. Out on the deck a small boat was lowered and Bligh and the eighteen men who chose to remain with him were forced into it. Provisions were given them, and they were set adrift.

The little boat carrying these nineteen men drifted west, past the New Hebrides, New Guinea, and Australia, the long distance to Timor, a Dutch settlement off the coast of Southern Asia. Their sufferings had been intense. Eventually they returned to England, there to give a full report on the mutiny.

As Fletcher Christian turned his ship into the dark night and left the little boat behind him, he had to decide where to go. Most of the men remaining on the *Bounty* wanted to return to Tahiti, but Christian well-knew that this would be too dangerous. He told them that, in time, a British naval ship should come in search for them, and Tahiti was not the place to be living at that time. So he headed for the Island of Tubuai, but there he found a lack of livestock as well as unfriendly natives. Finally, at the insistence of his men, he turned the ship toward Tahiti.

Tahiti is the largest of a little group of 14 islands that lie in the South Pacific. As the mutineers neared it, they could see massive volcanoes rising from its interior and an outer coral reef completely encircling it. Landing on the reef, they went ashore in smaller boats. For many of them it was a return to "paradise—coconuts, sugar cane, tropical fruits, and women. From the rugged interior, with its waterfalls and rapid streams cutting through steep mountains, to the belt of fertile soil near the shore, the Englishmen found much to enjoy.

As soon as they arrived on shore, sixteen of the mutineers voted to remain in Tahiti. But the other eight decided to cast their lot with Christian—for he was determined to sail away

shortly.

In the wild orgies of madness that were to follow on this island, after Christian and his eight had departed, two of the sixteen were killed by the natives because of their thievery and adulteries. The other fourteen were later caught by a searching party sent out from England. Placed in chains by Captain Edwards, of the *Pandora*, the party set out for Britain. During the passage, four were drowned when the ship struck a coral reef. Only ten returned to England, there to stand trial. By its verdict, three were executed.

Peter Heywood, one of those pardoned, had written his mother from Tahiti, after the mutiny. In it, he told of Christian's final request: "Gentlemen, I will carry you and land you wherever you please. I desire none to stay with me, but I have one favor to request, that you grant me the ship, tie the foresail, give me a few gallons of water, leave me to run before the wind, and I shall land upon the first island the ship drives to. I have done such an act that I cannot stay at Ouhiti (Tahiti). I will never live where I may be carried home to be a disgrace to my family."

At this, Edward Young, one of the midshipmen, and seven others stepped up to him and said, "We shall never leave you, Mr. Christian; go where you will."

The men who remained with Christian were John Williams, William Brown, Isaac Martin, John Mills, William McCoy, Matthew Quintal, Edward Young, and Alexander Smith (who later changed his name to John Adams).

On the final night in Tahiti, Christian spent the evening on shore with the crewmates he was leaving behind. Heywood wrote of this: "We had spent some two hours together, when Christian arose, and it was with difficulty that we spoke to each other. It was a sad farewell. He stepped into a canoe, and we saw him no more; for, in the morning, the ship was gone." The night of the 21st of September, 1789, was the last that civilization ever saw of Fletcher Christian.

With the eight that elected to remain with him, Christian sailed north

to another part of the island, and there the crew stayed long enough to marry Tahitian wives and take on provisions for a lengthy voyage. Mi'Mitti, the noble daughter of an important chief, married Christian. Brown, the ship's gardener, loaded the hold with plants from fruit trees. The other men brought chickens and goats on board. Also, six young Tahitian men were taken on as additional crewmen.

And then the *Bounty* sailed away into oblivion. Christian had had access back, in England, to the latest naval records; and, very likely, copies of the most recent annotated maps were in the chart room of the *Bounty*, which was a ship of the British navy. Christian had no doubt read of the discovery of the uninhabited island with water and good soil that lay a thousand miles east of him. For it appears that he sailed directly to it. On the morning of January 23, 1790, Pitcairn Island was sighted by the men on the *Bounty*.

Dropping anchor in a small cove, later to be known as Bounty Bay, they slowly unloaded the ship, carrying everything up the 200-foot high cliff to the Edge,—from which one can see the landing place and Bounty Bay. They found that the island did, indeed, contain water, wood, and good soil, as well as some fruit trees. Every movable thing was taken to shore and up the cliff. The *Bounty* was completely stripped, even to the planks from her sides, and then the hull was set on fire. The ship that had been their home for two years was no more.

Christian divided the settlement into sections, and soon all were busily engaged in building homes, clearing land for gardens, and setting out trees. Salt was obtained from the sea and an abundance of fish was available. Life in their new little world took on the routine of daily living. The continents around them were the scene of continual discontent, greed, strife, and misery. Could the brave new settlement escape the heritage of their forebears?

One day while rummaging through his sea chest, Christian discovered, deep beneath the spare clothing, the Bible that his mother had placed there

years before. As he held it in his hands, he recalled how she would read to him from it, when he was a child at her knees. He well-knew that she felt that this was the best gift she could give him. One day, he took it to a cave on the mountainside, and began reading in it. Many were the hours that he spent there. And then another began coming to the cave with him. It was Alexander Smith, who had by now changed his name to John Adams. As the days passed into weeks, Christian's book brought a wonderful peace into Adams' life. For he was finding what Christian had found not long before—that his sins could be forgiven through the forgiving grace of Jesus Christ.

But in spite of this, the next five years became a nightmare for the small colony. Williams, McCoy, and Quintal had always been heavy drinkers, and now, finding it not available, they began experimenting with native plants. McCoy had been brought up in a distillery, and, fevered with a desire for his old way of life, discovered that he could make an alcoholic drink from the roots of the native tee plant. One day, Williams' wife fell from the cliffs and died while trying to gather eggs from the nests of sea birds. Shortly thereafter, Williams, while half drunk went down to the home of one of the Tahitian men, Talalu, and took his wife. In a rage, Talalu, uniting the other Tahitian men with him, began a warfare that took the lives of Williams, Martin, Brown, and Mills. Fletcher Christian was taken unawares, while working in his garden, and killed. John Adams, though shot in the shoulder, managed to escape, while Edward Young was successfully hidden by his wife. The four remaining Englishmen and the widows of the men who had been murdered realized that they had but a short time unless something was done immediately. In a sudden attack they slew all the Tahitian men.

But McCoy and Quintal were still alive and well, and now every imaginable vice was practiced by them. Treachery and aggression raged, and no one felt his life secure. Some of the women, in desperation, tried to get away from the island on a raft, but this

they were not permitted to do. The future of the little colony seemed dark.

One day, in a drunken depression, the distiller, McCoy, made his way down to the rocks by the water's edge, and there fastening a large stone to his body, picked it up and jumped into the ocean. Thus a sad but miserable life ended.

Then Quintal's wife died in an accident and he demanded another, but no one on the island wanted to become the wife of a drunk who earlier, in an angry stupor, had bitten off his wife's ear upon learning that she had brought in a smaller than usual catch of fish. Finally Quintal demanded that either Adams or Young give him one of their wives, or he would kill them. Having no doubt that he intended to do this, they made him drunk with his own liquor, overpowered him, and dispatched him with an ax.

And now the community settled down to the peace it had been seeking for years. Never again was the use of alcoholic beverages allowed on the island. It was outlawed. The year was 1798. Eight years had passed since the mutineers had first landed on Pitcairn. Adams and Young were now the sole survivors of fifteen men who had come to the island, and thirty-six-year-old Adams was to see Young succumb to an attack of asthma two years later. For the first time, an islander had died by a natural death.

An island paradise, far off in the Pacific. And yet when people came to live there, they brought the vices and immorality of the rest of the world with them. Passion, strife, drunkenness, and bloodshed were the result.

Is there no answer? Is there nothing that can keep man from destroying himself?

But then came the discoveries at Pitcairn.

Discovery at Pitcairn

It seemed that there was no hope. The past was following them

too closely. Liquor and passion were bringing the lawlessness of civilization to this once-peaceful island.

Of all the men once on the island, John Adams now stood alone. What was he to do? The future seemed dark and bleak. There must be an answer.

With eleven women and twenty-three children on the island, sons and daughters of his companions, Adams began to realize that he had a great responsibility to lead them into a better way of life. Going down one day to Christian's Cave, he lay down and spent some time gazing out across his island home and over the waters that stretched to the great beyond. He thought over the experiences of the past, and recalled the many happy times when Christian had read to him from the Bible and they had talked about how the island might have a better way of life.

But while he was thinking on these things, he fell asleep. In his own words, he describes what followed: "I had a dream that changed my whole life. There seemed to be standing beside me an angel who spoke to me, warning me of my past life, and then he called me to repent and go down and train the children in the way of Christian's Bible." With this, he awoke and seemed to feel the very presence of God about him. Kneeling there, he asked his Creator for forgiveness for the sins of a lifetime.

From that day on, he carried with him a deep and abiding repentance for his former way of life, and he tried not only to live on a higher level himself, but he also determined that he must help those young people learn of God as well. It was now the year 1800.

John Adams had four children of his own, but he was very much attached to Fletcher Christian's eldest son. This boy had been the first to be born on the island; and, because he was born on a Thursday in October, his father had named him Thursday October Christian. By now Thursday was ten years of age. Adams told him

of the dream, and Thursday asked that he might learn to read his father's Bible. Digging it out of the old sea chest, they went with it frequently to the cave and there, in the quietness of this shady den, Thursday October learned to read.

Sorry for his past life and zealous for the honor of God, this tough old sailor became a softened man and began to teach the minds of the younger people, about him, the love and fear of God. He prayed for them and conducted morning and evening worship, a custom that is still practiced on the island.

As the families of the island gathered morning and evening and studied the Word of God together, they grew strong in its messages. A depth of character and a firmness to do the right began to mark their bearing. A wonderful peace came into their lives, and with thankfulness of heart they determined never to return to the old ways of life.

From the Bible they learned their duty to be kind and helpful to one another. And they learned the importance of obedience to the will of God, as revealed in His Word. Repeatedly, they found, in Scripture, that, when the people of God did not obey His moral law, the results were always disastrous. Together, from the written Word, they found that which other civilizations of our time have yet to learn,—that God means what He says, and that He sent His Son to enable man to obey all that He says. And that those who refuse obedience, will always suffer.

When it was suggested that a small school building be built, the five older boys—Thursday Christian, his brother Charles, Daniel McCoy, George Young, and Matthew Quintal—quickly set to work and soon, with the help of the younger boys, their first schoolhouse was completed.

At first the daily program consisted of study from one Bible. These were happy times for all. On one occasion Adams asked Arthur Quintal and Robert Young to prepare a plot of ground for some yams. When the ground was plowed, he offered them a

little gunpowder. They both declined and said they would rather have some extra lessons from the Bible, a request which he happily fulfilled.

Adams diligently sought to teach his people the importance of prayer—prayer for protection, prayer for guidance, and the prayer of thanksgiving. On one occasion, when he and some of the women went out fishing on the south side of the island, the surf broke their canoe. It was impossible to scale the cliffs; and so, gathering them together, he offered a simple prayer for strength to swim to a distant point. All having reached it safely, they shared the story with the others at home. It was experiences such as this, combined with the daily study and prayer, that day by day strengthened and ennobled this quiet people of the Pitcairn.

Alone, Adams began every day with earnest prayer to God, that he might guide his people aright. He had no formal schooling, and as both pastor and teacher of the entire settlement, he felt his need of divine help. It was given day by day, as he needed it.

He was attentive to the needs of all. If any were ill, he went and prayed with them. Consistently, he asked God to help, and then went forward and did what he knew to be right. On this island, where looseness of morals and indifference to religion had once prevailed, a wonderful new way of life was being discovered. The sordid round of crime and treachery that had marred its early history were becoming only a memory, as a younger generation of a strange blood mixture was growing to maturity, under the influence of the book that Adams had opened before them—the Book of God.

On September 17, 1814, quite by accident, two British frigates, the “Briton” and the “Tabus,” arrived at Pitcairn. They were searching for a pirate ship, the “Esse,” which had been seizing English whalers. Headed for Valparaiso from the Marquesas Islands, they suddenly came in sight of land that they were not expecting; for, by an error in reckoning, they thought Pitcairn to be 200 miles distant. Adams recognized the flags and well-

knew that captains in command of British naval ships were not given to sentiment. Calling Thursday, he requested him to go out and meet the captains. So, accompanied by eighteen-year-old George Young, Thursday paddled out in a small canoe to the side of the “Briton.” Captain Staines was astonished to hear Thursday call out in good English, “Won’t you heave us a rope now?” Arriving on board, the mystery of how English-speaking people happened to be on this little island was quickly explained by the boys. Their deportment and natural, easy manners interested everyone. To the question, “Who are you?” twenty-four-year-old Thursday replied with frankness, “I am Thursday October Christian, son of Fletcher Christian, the mutineer, by a Tahitian mother, and the first born on this island.” They then ate lunch with the captain, and he observed how they prayed before taking food. When asked, they told him that John Adams had taught them this. To these naval men this was amazing—the simple piety of these young men, living so far from all civilized lands, yet in the vicinity of islands whose peoples were sunken in heathenism and ignorance.

Both Captain Staines and Captain Pison went ashore, saw the colony, and interviewed Adams. He offered to return with them and stand trial in England for his part in the mutiny. Immediately the islanders gathered around and pled that he might remain. Both captains were deeply touched by the scene and resolved not to disturb the colony. Upon their return to England an official report was presented, with the request that Adams not be sought for. Since Bligh was now dead, it was decided that the case should remain closed.

On March 6, 1829, John Adams peacefully passed to his rest at the age of sixty-five. And Thursday October Christian became the recognized leader of the island. With the passing of the years additional vessels stopped at the island and reported on the remarkable way of life to be found there and the fact that it was directly attributable to the reading of the Bible.

New insights from the Word of God will continually be found by those who, in humility and prayer, search its pages. And this was to be the experience of the faithful Christians on the Island of Pitcairn. Coming in at night from their gardens, they would study the Bible to learn more of its treasures.

In 1876, the little group came upon the truth that Jesus is soon to return to this earth for His own. How this cheered their hearts! All they had was the Word of God, but they knew that, as they studied and trusted themselves to it, they would always be guided aright.

Noble stories and wonderful principles were to be found in this Book of books. But the more they studied, the more they learned. In October of 1886, after checking and rechecking, they came upon the truth that Sunday sacredness was not to be found in the Bible. This came as something of a shock to them, as you might imagine, but additional reading confirmed this fact.

Thursday October Christian II (Thursday’s son) was the leader of the island at the time. He and Simon Young, the beloved and respected elder of the church, were the first to accept this new Bible truth. And so it was that, within a short time, the church bell was no longer tolling on Sunday, the first day, but on Saturday, the Seventh day, as it called the people to worship. For each of the families had studied it out for themselves, and nearly all on the island had accepted the simple facts it taught about this.

Over the years, a better way of life had opened up before this quiet people who chose to pattern their lives according to the Bible. And, as they studied, they learned a simple Biblical way of life that has become a model for many in other lands.

It is of interest that, in 1838, the Pitcairners drafted a Constitution for the government of the island. Within it were enlightened laws, far in advance of the rest of the world. For example, as of 1838, every 18-year old might vote, but this did not come to the United States until 1871. England still does not have it. In 1838, women were

granted the right to vote on Pitcairn. But not until 1920, in the United States, and 1928, in Great Britain, were women given equal voting rights.

After the first nine-year orgy of violence on Pitcairn, the island found the Bible and thereafter became a model of moral prosperity for the entire world. During those first years, while John Adams was the leader, his island had no written laws. They were not needed. Later, when they began to appear, most of them dealt with animals: chickens digging up yam patches, etc. One important law prohibited liquor on the island. The reign of terror, created by McCoy's tee-root (from root) whiskey, was never to be forgotten. There is a jail on Pitcairn, because the British authorities thought one should be constructed. But none of the island-

ers can remember when it was last used. At this time the iron door stands ajar, rusted tight in a half-open position. But no one sees any need to replace it.

In the story of Pitcairn, we find what the Bible can do for men and women. Ever since John Adams and Edward Young dug Fletcher Christian's Bible out of the old sea chest, the Word of God has played an important role in Pitcairn's affairs. A recent Bible census noted that there were 247 Bibles on Pitcairn. This is about three for every man, woman, and child on the island. The pastor declares that the Bible is the best read book on the island, and he is probably right.

Would you like to live with the Pitcairners? We both would, I am sure.

But though it may not be practical to move there, yet we can have the faith of the Pitcairners. For it is the Word of God, hidden in their hearts, an open Bible before them that is the real secret of the happiness of this little island in the South Pacific.

The story of Pitcairn has indeed been a fascinating one. It has explained mysteries, but has uncovered still more. Now we must travel across the world in order to find the answers we are seeking. This trip will take us to other lands and other places, but this is necessary.

For we must now go back—beyond Pitcairn—to peoples and events of many centuries earlier.

And only then will we understand the mystery of Pitcairn.

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