

THE PITCAIRN ISLANDERS, AND THE MUTINY OF THE *BOUNTY*.

BY DR. ROBERT BROWN, F.L.S., F.R.G.S.



JOHN ADAMS' GRAVE.

THE word "colony" usually is suggestive of broad, lone lands, into which men weary of the over-crowded acres of the Old World have hived off. In the far South, and away over the Atlantic, there are dependencies of Britain so extensive that these islands might be dropped into one of their provinces, while in India there is a single valley so thickly populated that it contains more than a fifth of the inhabitants of the whole world. In England and Wales there are 421 persons to the square mile; in Canada there are 620 acres for each man, woman, or child in the Dominion; while in the Australian colonies there is—to use the language of the statistician—but a "fraction of a soul" settled on each square mile of the great Antipodean continent. These are the Greater Britains—the distant wings of that mighty body corporate, of which a few little isles in the Atlantic are the heart that moves all. But there are Lesser Britains also. There is, for instance, the tiny isle of St. Kitts, on which are settled 414 people to the square mile; Antigua, which has to support 367 in the same space; Malta, which is over-crowded with 1,238; Gibraltar, which finds room on its

rocky face for 8,775; Aden, 4,501; and Hong Kong, that Sinito-British isle, with a swarming hive of working bees numbering 3,935 on each square mile. These are all colonies, in the strict acceptation of the term, though British immigration to the smaller ones scarcely exists, just as in time it will cease to the larger ones. All of them are mentioned in official lists, and come under the cognisance of the Secretary of State charged with the control of our dependencies. Each of them has its governor and staff of officials, its blue book, and its budget; and most of them possess what is not always so pleasant a feature in the eyes of the Pro-Consul and his masters in Downing Street—its Parliament of two Houses, its "Ministry," and its "Opposition;" its "ins," striving to retain their places, and its "outs," ever plotting votes of no confidence, which are to seat them on the Treasury bench. But there are other colonies also—colonies peopled by men of the English breed, self-supporting and home-ruled, which give no trouble to the Colonial Office, and whose names never appear in the reports of the bureaucrats. In some respects these tiny islet colonies are of more interest than the larger ones, for they show how distant patches of ocean-surrounded land have been peopled in earlier times, and prove by their prosperity the inherent capacity of the Anglo-Saxon race for self-government. One of the best known and not the least romantic of these spots is Pitcairn Island; for the community settled in this lovely dot in the Pacific have a history all their own, which, though often told, yet seems never to lose its freshness for the world's ear. We hear so seldom of the Pitcairners, that when a stray ship touches at their home, the news of their doings come to the jaded dwellers in cities like a tale of Utopia—gentler than Ponce de Leon's romance of the fountains of perpetual youth, and more authentic than those pictured Islands

CHURCH AND SCHOOL BUILT BY JOHN ADAMS.  
(From original Sketch by Captain Bedford, R.N.)





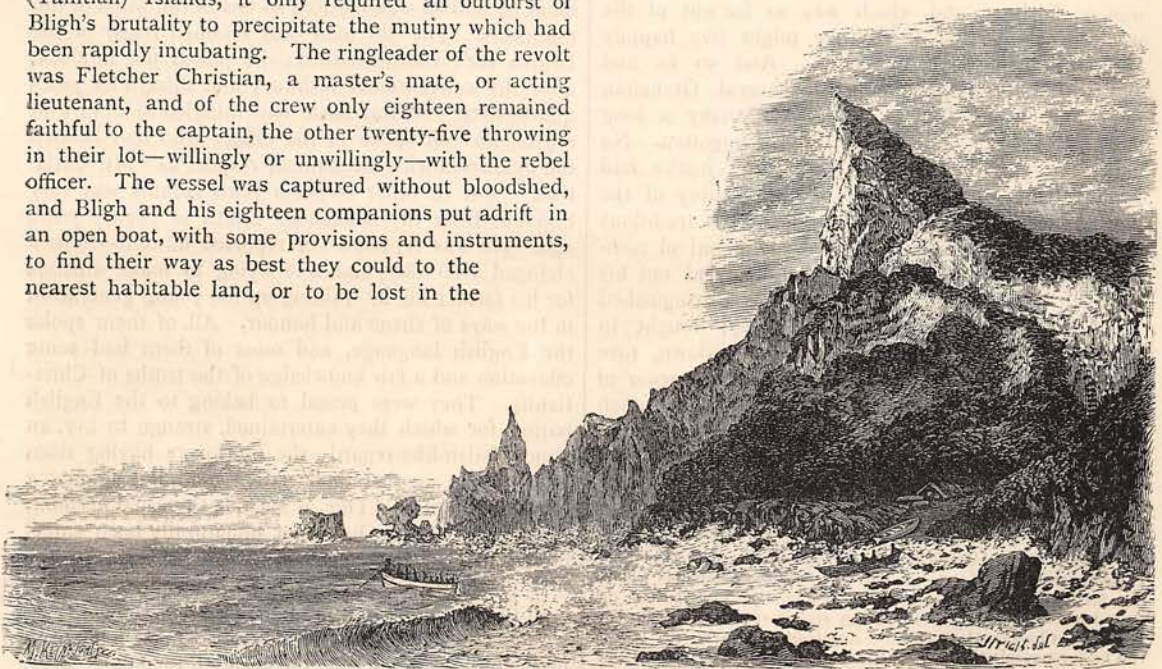
ONE OF THE PITCAIRN ISLANDERS' HOUSES. (From original Sketch by Captain Bedford, R.N.)

of the *Blest*, which the mediæval seamen were fabled to have sighted in the "region of the sunset."

When, ninety-two years ago, the *Bounty* was despatched to the then recently discovered South Sea Islands to search for and collect the bread-fruit and other plants, to be naturalised in the West Indies, there were not wanting those who prophesied that before long there would be mischief on board. Her commander, Lieutenant Bligh, was a good seaman, but a sullen martinet, of a type now extinct in the Royal Navy, but in those days of the triangle and "three dozen all round for breakfast" only too common, while the crew were in many instances the off-scourings of the English seaports. Under ordinary circumstances they might have been kept under control, but demoralised by a long stay among the Otaheitan (Tahitian) Islands, it only required an outburst of Bligh's brutality to precipitate the mutiny which had been rapidly incubating. The ringleader of the revolt was Fletcher Christian, a master's mate, or acting lieutenant, and of the crew only eighteen remained faithful to the captain, the other twenty-five throwing in their lot—willingly or unwillingly—with the rebel officer. The vessel was captured without bloodshed, and Bligh and his eighteen companions put adrift in an open boat, with some provisions and instruments, to find their way as best they could to the nearest habitable land, or to be lost in the

wide ocean as it was believed they would. This happened near Tofua, one of the Friendly Islands, and the last thing seen of the *Bounty* was its heading towards the paradise which the crew had grumbled at leaving, while over the still waters were heard shouts of "Hurrah for Otaheite!"

Then came out the courage of this captain of hitherto uncontrolled temper. Though eighteen of the officers and crew had remained by, or rather had been put into the boat with him, many were but ill-disposed towards him, and before they compassed the 3,600 nautical miles between the spot where they had been cast adrift and the island of Timor, rebellion was often scarcely disguised. Yet during that forty-one days' navigation, undertaken under



LANDING-PLACE, BOUNTY BAY, PITCAIRN ISLAND. (From original Sketch by Captain Bedford, R.N.)



the direst hardships, no one perished—a fact highly creditable to the foresight and care exercised by Bligh.

When the news reached England it caused great excitement, and the Admiralty immediately fitted out a vessel with a view to capture the mutineers. This ship, the *Pandora*, in due time reached Otaheite, and found a number of the crew of the *Bounty* living on shore, in that sweet haven which had been dreamt of when they were plotting treason against their king and country. The fates seemed, however, to have been against the rebel crew, for the *Pandora* was wrecked off the coast of Australia, and thus only ten of the mutineers reached England to stand their trial. The end of this court-martial was that three of the offenders were pardoned, four were tried and acquitted, having been proved to be unwilling participants in the revolt, and the remaining three were executed. But there were still nine of the mutineers to be accounted for, and their fate long remained a mystery. The majority of the crew who had taken possession of the *Bounty* were ignorant seamen, who scarcely gave a thought to the morrow. It was enough for them that they were free of Captain Bligh and his cat, and of the stuffy galley of his hated ship. In Matavai Bay they married native wives, slept, ate plentifully, and drank what they could, little recking that the king's warrant was speeding over the high seas, a Nemesis which was to bring swift punishment to them for their crime. But Fletcher Christian never abandoned himself to any such day-dreams. He was aware that Otaheite was no safe retreat for the mutineers, and it is very doubtful whether it was ever his intention to remain there except temporarily. He used to talk of a rocky islet which he knew about, where there was no harbour, and which was so far out of the track of ships that there they might live happily and end their days in peace. And so he and eight of his companions with several Otaheitan men and women set sail, and for many a long year were lost sight of and even forgotten. No efforts were made to search for them; justice had been satisfied, and the tale of the Mutiny of the *Bounty* was fast passing into one of the traditions of the sea. As for Bligh, he was again put in command of a vessel, and successfully carried out his original commission. He afterwards distinguished himself in the Mutiny at the Nore; fought in the Battles of Copenhagen and Camperdown, rose to the rank of vice-admiral, and became Governor of New South Wales. But his fate was in the end much as it was in the beginning. The colonists and he did not agree, and finding that either they or he would have to leave, they cut the Gordian knot by removing him by force from the country.\*

\* Previously to this date he had commanded a ship of the line in the French revolutionary war. But having for the second time goaded by his harsh conduct his crew into mutiny, they rose and ran the vessel into a French harbour. Bligh died in 1817, and is buried in Lambeth Churchyard, London. Apparently, however, the fact of his having transplanted the bread-fruit-tree in the West Indies mainly struck the epitaph-writer, for no mention is made of the chief episode in the admiral's career.

Twenty years had passed away. Europe in the meantime had been shaken by long wars, and with the nation straining every sinew to preserve its freedom, Christian and his companions had long ceased to exercise the public mind. Then, in 1808, came the sudden news that they had been discovered, or rather the remnant of them and their descendants, on Pitcairn Island, in the Pacific. It was not, however, until 1814 that a British war-ship called at the island, and learned the history of those who sailed for Otaheite in the *Bounty*. Originally the colonists consisted of nine British seamen, six Otaheitan men, and twelve women of the same race; and among the earliest precautions Christian took to prevent any attempt at escape, was to burn the vessel which had been the scene of their first crime. In ten years all the original colonists had died, for the most part, a violent death. The Otaheitan men, provoked by the ill-treatment of the seamen, murdered several of them, and in revenge the dead men's widows slew their husbands' assassins. Of the survivors, one died of asthma, a second committed suicide, mad with some intoxicating liquor which he had contrived to distil from the roots of native plants, and a third was put to death in self-defence.

There accordingly only remained a single member of the old mutinous crew, the rest of the male colonists being young people, the children of Otaheitans and Englishmen. This survivor was Alexander Smith, who had, however, changed his name to John Adams; and under this designation he is universally known. Adams, at first, was scared at the appearance of a war-ship, and the sight of the once-familiar uniform and colours. But the captain exercised a humane discretion in allowing him to remain with his little colony, instead of taking him to England to meet the punishment he had so well merited as one of the worst of the mutineers. The old man still retained many of the British tar's characteristics: he pulled his forelock, after the conventional fashion; and though for years quarterdeck and fore-castle had mingled alike in wild orgies, he still spoke of the officer who had headed the mutineers with mechanical respect as "Mr. Christian." But in other respects John Adams was very different from the Alexander Smith of twenty years ago. He was reported—or reported himself—to be a changed character, and was trying to make amends for his former life by training up the young generation in the ways of virtue and honour. All of them spoke the English language, and most of them had some education and a fair knowledge of the truths of Christianity. They were proud to belong to the English nation, for which they entertained, strange to say, an almost fetish-like regard—the mutineers having risen in arms, not against their native land, but against a tyrannous captain. This, at least, is the usual account. But of late doubts have not unnaturally been entertained of the strict truth of Adams' story. In the first place, there was no one to contradict him, for, with the exception of a few native women, the only eyewitnesses of the scenes he described must have been mere children at the time the events transpired. Next, it was, as might have been expected, Adams' interest



to represent his past and present conduct in the most favourable light to his naval visitors; and though it is by no means impossible that this sudden change had come over his life, Adams, it must not be forgotten, was a desperate character when on board the *Bounty*, and it is well known that the tale he told of his share in the actual mutiny is utterly false. Nor is it probable that the mystery of Christian's death will ever be cleared up. The mutiny broke out owing to the captain's tyranny, but Christian behaved to his companions in crime even more despotically than Bligh ever did; and when he reached Pitcairn with eight of the most hardened of the mutineers, he grew sullen and remorseful, as if overwhelmed by the enormity of his crime in seizing the ship he ought to have fought for, and in setting adrift—to perish, as he believed—eighteen of his companions in arms. He established himself in a cave on the little island, and as he always kept a store of provisions in that retreat, seems to have apprehended that some day he might have to defend himself against an enemy, either from within or from without the community. The usual account given is that he was murdered by the Otaheitan, but to other visitors Adams declared that he threw himself over the cliffs and was drowned. To one set of visitors he would describe "Mr. Christian" as cheerful; to another, as gloomy and half mad. Indeed, there are some grounds for doubting whether Christian did not by some means escape from the island, and that Adams was anxious, for reasons not difficult to divine, to conceal the fact.

Curiously enough, a few years after the mutiny there was a very general opinion prevalent in the Lake District of Cumberland and Westmoreland that Christian was in England, and had been noticed making frequent private visits to an aunt who lived in that part of the country, of which indeed he himself was a native, and where he was well known. This was in 1808 or 1809, and so persistent did the gossip become in the vicinity of Keswick, where the traditions of his visits are still fresh, that it is said that the Government began to pay some heed to it. Then Christian was seen no more. About the same period he is believed to have been detected in Plymouth by a man who, of all in the world, was little likely to be deceived as to his person. This was Captain Heywood, who as a midshipman left on board the *Bounty*, was tried as a mutineer and condemned to death, but who was afterwards pardoned, and lived to justify the clemency shown him by the good service he did for his country. Captain Heywood was walking along Fore Street, in Plymouth, when he noticed in front of him an individual whose figure seemed strangely familiar. At that time no news had been heard of Christian and his companions, but immediately the idea struck him that this was his old companion and superior officer. The thought, however, appeared so ridiculous that he was on the point of dismissing it as idle when the man, attracted by the noise of footsteps behind him, turned round. To the astonishment of Heywood, the face was as like that of Christian as the back; and his

first impression became a firm belief when the stranger instantly started into a run. Heywood followed, but Christian's "doppel-ganger" escaped down some by-streets, and he saw him no more. Plymouth, naturally, was one of the last places where so notorious a personage would have been likely to appear; but the idiosyncrasy of criminals to visit their old haunts is one of the most familiar of psychological traits. Captain Heywood remained to the end of his life convinced that the lonely man of Plymouth was the outlaw of the *Bounty*; but the fear of being the means of another victim expiating his share in an episode which all would have willingly forgotten, checked him from making further search or acquainting any but intimate friends with the strange adventure he had met with.

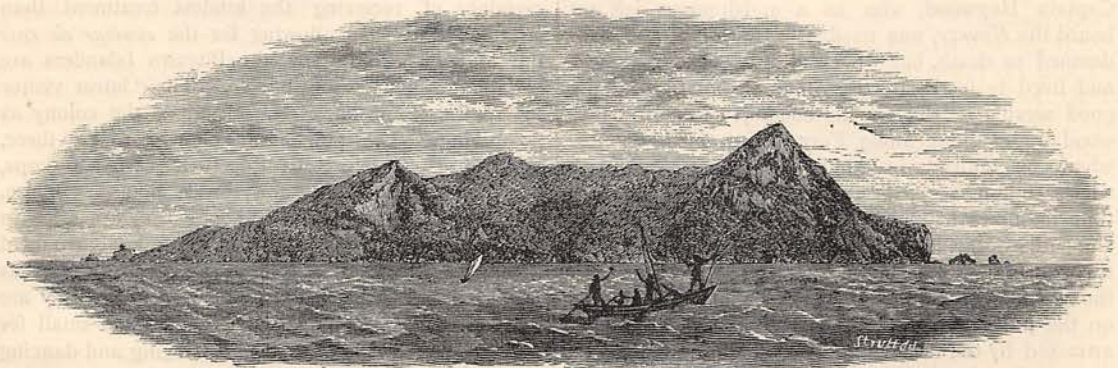
After Captain Beechey's visit in 1825, the Pitcairn Islanders were frequently heard of, and attracted to them several Englishmen—among others, a chaplain, who still remains with a section of the little colony on Norfolk Island. This migration was necessitated by the limited size of the islanders' original retreat. At first they went to Otaheite; but, shocked at the immorality of their relatives there, speedily returned. Then, in 1855, they were removed to Norfolk Island; but a number of families, longing for their old home, returned to Pitcairn, leaving on the former island over 200 people. These have since greatly increased, and have been so far recognised by the Colonial Office as to have their magistrates formally commissioned; but otherwise they do not greatly concern the magnates of Whitehall, though among the most virtuous of Her Majesty's subjects. Adams died in 1829, and his name is now revered as the patriarch of the little colony. It was he and Young, one of the midshipmen, who, awed by the terrible end the other mutineers had come to, resolved to begin a new life in the community, in which they were the only adults. They commenced to teach the children, and to instruct them in religion, and generally to lay the foundation of that piety for which the Pitcairners are still distinguished. But Adams' step-daughter, who was living last year, declared to the end that Adams was a bad man, and that it was Young who did all the good work for which his shipmate has got the credit. Be that as it may, on no coast can a seaman be wrecked with greater certainty of receiving the kindest treatment than on this; and even allowing for the *couleur de rose* tint of such descriptions, the Pitcairn Islanders are certainly a remarkable people. Their latest visitor—Captain Robinson, R.N.—describes the colony as prospering. The population number ninety-three, and are engaged in cultivating various tropical crops, particularly arrowroot, yams, sweet potatoes, maize, fruits, and vegetables; and, though they are often in want of civilised necessaries, and are sadly troubled by mice, and the scarcity of water, seem prosperous and greatly attached to their island, which they are well aware will at no distant period be too small for their numbers. They are fond of singing and dancing—tastes inherited from their maternal ancestors; but their code of laws shows that any serious crimes, or



even gross infringements of morality, were never contemplated by the legislators who from time to time have amended these simple regulations, originally drawn up for them by a captain in the Royal Navy. The oldest man on the island is Thursday October Christian, grandson of Fletcher Christian. He combines the offices of schoolmaster and pastor of the little settlement; but the magistrate is James M'Koy, also grandson of one of the mutineers. He is assisted in his duties by two councillors, while the heads of families are convened for consultation in cases of emergency, any very grave cases being left for the decision of the captain of the first war-ship that arrives. But though the magistrate and his assistants are at once the interpreters and the finishers of the law, their duty has been hitherto, if not a sinecure, at all events not more onerous than it is honorary. The islanders' only scourge is consumption, evidently inherited from their Otaheitan mothers; but with the exception of trifling ailments they are, though of course all nearly related, a healthy, handsome race of people. When the Queen heard of their wants, with great consideration she despatched an organ as a present to them. Captain Robinson informs us that, though the sea was stormy, the "Governor" and a picked crew came out the moment the vessel appeared, and bore the precious burden ashore, and up the steep path leading to their village at the top of the island. That night the whole colony assembled in the school-church, and over the waters the seamen could hear the tones of the instrument, while with thankful hearts our far-distant fellow-countrymen sang the familiar "God save the Queen." Family prayers are said in every house morning and evening, as they were in Captain Beechey's time, and no one thinks of taking food before asking a blessing on it. Their piety is sincere, though flavoured with quaint phrases, savouring sometimes of what might be thought "cant." It must, however, be recollected that their religious phraseology was learned from men of little education, and naturally fond of couching their lessons in a rather ornate verbiage. Every one works, and as boots are precious they go barefooted except on Sunday. The community was at first an anarchy; then a kind of patriarchal dictatorship, with John Adams as absolute ruler; and

now it is the simplest form of republic, every one over seventeen years of age, females included, having a vote in the election of the "President," who is, moreover, though eligible for re-election, only tolerated from year to year. Their greatest pride is, however, to be thought British subjects, and among their sorrows Admiral de Horsey mentions the dread which somehow or other had been instilled into their minds that the Queen looked with disfavour on their return from Norfolk Island; and Captain Robinson notes that they considered the present of the organ a proof that once more their Sovereign had pardoned their supposed offence. They are not likely to want for necessaries, and even, it is feared, for luxuries. Already two committees in England have collected funds enough to supply them with a boat and numerous other articles they were in want of, and which are lying at Coquimbo, waiting the first opportunity of being despatched to their destination.

On Lord Howe Island there is also a little Crusoe colony of English people, but it is very likely that before long they will all leave for Sydney, thence to scatter as it may seem good to them. On the lonely Kermedecs there were also until recently a few families. On Ascension, an isolated heap of cinders in the Atlantic Ocean, there is a naval sanatorium and settlement, administered under naval regulations as "the tender to the *Flora*;" and on Tristan da Cunha, between the West Coast of Africa and South America, there is also another Crusoe settlement of Britons, engaged in breeding cattle and killing seals, but altogether isolated from the world, unless when at rare intervals visited by passing ships. But the Tristaners, who number about eighty-five people, mostly of semi-negro descent, seem happy and contented, and little inclined to change their life, or to receive more attention than they hitherto have obtained from the Colonial Office authorities. On the Bonins there was until recently a similar pseudo-colony, and indeed on many other isles of the Pacific there are little settlements of British subjects, who live and even flourish without any aid from the land they and their fathers were born in. But none of them equal in picturesqueness the Pitcairners, whose oft-told story is ever fresh.



PITCAIRN ISLAND. (From original Sketch by Captain Bedford, R.N.)