



The Story of Pitcairn Island

Many, many years ago, or, to be exact, in the year 1787, King George III of England fitted out a small ship, called the "Bounty," manned her with forty-five sailors and a courageous captain named Bligh, and started the expedition on a long trip to the South Sea Islands. Some of the islands in the West Indies, belonging to England, were uninhabited because there was no food growing on them, so the king was sending the "Bounty" out to the South Sea Islands to gather breadfruit trees, which were to be carried back to the West Indies and planted there.

Could these brave sailors have known only a part of the adventures they were to meet on this trip, they might have hesitated to start on such a hazardous voyage. The "Bounty" and her crew set sail from the shores of Old England on December 29 in the year 1787, with provisions on board to last a year and a half. Just ten months after they had set sail they arrived at the island of Tahiti, where they spent six months gathering the breadfruit trees, and also making friends with the natives of the islands. Some close friendships were formed between the sailors and some of the native women, and when it came time for the "Bounty" to sail, they found it hard to break away from the friends who had treated them so kindly during their stay on Tahiti. In April, 1789, there was evidence of an approaching storm, and Captain Bligh gave orders for the ship to sail.

The "Bounty" had not been at sea very long until the sailors became very much dissatisfied, and they wished they had remained in Tahiti. Captain Bligh was a hard and tyrannical captain, and as they thought of the long, hard voyage to the West Indies, and then the trip home again, their hearts rebelled, and they determined to turn back to the island and their many friends.

It was a serious offense for sailors to refuse to obey, or to mutiny, in fact, it would mean death if news of it ever got back to England, and they were captured. But, realizing all this, on the night of April 28, 1789, four of the men entered Captain Bligh's room, dragged him from his bed, overpowered him, and tied his hands behind him. A small boat was made ready, and the irate captain and eighteen of his men were lowered in the boat to the sea, and set adrift. They were given one hundred fifty pounds of bread, sixteen pieces of meat averaging two pounds each, six quarts of rum, six bottles of wine, and twenty-eight gallons of water.

It had taken the "Bounty" ten months to make the journey from England, and it seemed almost impossible that those who were sent adrift would ever get back home again in just a small

rowboat. But the strong-hearted captain allotted to each man just so much food and water for each day, and they set out to row thirty-six hundred miles. A few birds were caught now and then for food, and at night they spread their blankets to catch the dew and sucked them in the morning to save water. These brave men, encountering every kind of weather, enduring dreadful sufferings, untold hardships and miseries, finally reached the island of Timor, a Dutch settlement, and were there taken on board a large vessel, and were soon safe back in Old England.

You are glad, I know, to learn that the captain and his men reached home safely; but what about the "Bounty" and the bold, bad sailors who mutinied? A few of them returned to the island of Tahiti and their friends. But, knowing very well that the king of England would not allow them to go unpunished if they could be captured, some of them determined to search out some secluded spot where they might hide themselves and escape punishment. Their fears were well grounded, for the king did send out a ship to find the mutineers, and fourteen of them were captured and returned to England. Five of these were hanged.

Before the king's officers arrived on Tahiti, nine of the sailors had taken the ship "Bounty," and with six native men and eleven native women, set sail, searching for some isolated spot where they might make their home and be safe from the law. Fletcher Christian, who now took command of the "Bounty," had heard of a small island in the Pacific named Pitcairn, and they set out in search of it. On January 23, 1790, they caught sight of the island. When they had landed and explored this tiny dot of the Pacific, it seemed an ideal place to hide from the long arm of the British law, for it was about five miles around the island and but two miles and a half across it at the widest point, and it was far removed from the lanes of ocean travel.

Everything they thought they might need was taken off the "Bounty" onto the island, and the ship was then set afire and burned, as an additional safeguard against detection. Imagine how they must have felt, only twenty-six of them on this little island in the great Pacific, no homes, no friends, no conveniences, few of life's necessities, and the ship "Bounty," their only means of leaving the island, burned. They set themselves industriously to build houses, and were soon comfortably settled.

The story of the next few years is one of jealousies, hatreds, treachery, and bloodshed. They fought and killed one another until, in the year 1800, John Adams was the sole male survivor, the only man left on the island.

Picture him, if your imagination can; the lone monarch of a godless, helpless, little band of ignorant people. Shut off from the rest of the world on that small island, he had plenty of time to think of his past life, and to consider the future of himself and those under his care.

In one of the trunks of the sailors, which had been taken from the "Bounty," he found a book. He read it; it touched his heart and changed his outlook on life. He resolved to live a new life. Can you imagine what book it was? Only one book will make the change that Adams experienced. That book was the Bible.

His was a deep and abiding repentance, and he began immediately to instill in the minds of the women and children the truths of the Bible, which had changed his life. Soon the spirit of all was changed, and joy and peace reigned in the little island kingdom. Where hatred had been before, there was now love. Their sins and vices were laid aside, and they began to live clean lives. They became more industrious, and their farms looked better and their homes more homelike. A school was started in their midst. They took more pride in their personal appearance. A church was built, and the voice of song and prayer could often be heard. It was a wonderful change to be brought about by the reading of a single book.

What the Bible has done on Pitcairn Island it has done in all parts of the world. It gives men a desire to be better, it changes their individual lives.

If we feel we should like to be better, one thing that will help us is the reading of the Bible. It is not a book for old people only, but for young people as well. In it you will find stories of heroes and heroines, stories of war, biography, poetry, and even love stories that are true and uplifting. It is the world's most interesting book. If you don't believe it, just try reading it.

Shipwrecked On Pitcairn:

One time, a ship was wrecked while on its way home from San Francisco to Liverpool. The crew found a warm welcome on Pitcairn Island. All the people went to the beach to meet them. Every home in the little village opened its doors to help in every way it could. Soon the shipwrecked people seemed like members of the families where they lived. They helped in the daily work, and joined in the family worship. It was fifty-one days before they could go on their way. Then a ship going to San Francisco took them away. The crew seemed as sad to leave their island friends as the islanders were to have their guests depart.

What do you suppose these grateful men did in return for the hospitality that had been shown them? They told the people of San Francisco how kindly they had been treated. They told them how generously their island friends had shared with them. Then they asked for gifts to be sent to the island.

The generous people of San Francisco began to give. All kinds of articles poured in from every direction, -cooking dishes, tinware, spoons, tin pails and wooden pails, cups, clothing made and unmade, buttons, needles, pins, and almost every useful thing that could be thought of. The school was remembered with slates and a large supply of schoolbooks. The one island copy of an old geography was replaced by a number of others, which opened to the children a world before undreamed of. That which was a real luxury to the islanders was a good supply of flour. And, to crown all, the Mason and Hamlin Organ Company sent a beautifully toned organ.

The precious organ was lifted on the shoulders of strong men, and carried up the steep path to the little village. Nor was the heavy burden set down until they reached the little thatch-roofed church, where it was placed beside the reading table. All the people, old and young, gathered around while the good captain played, "Shall We Gather at the River?" Every voice joined in the song, and tears were in many eyes as they listened for the first time to the tones of a perfect-keyed instrument.

One of the ships that carried the gifts brought also many letters of gratitude from the shipwrecked men who had lately been their guests. You cannot imagine the feelings of the islanders to be so highly favored and so generously remembered. To them it had been a real pleasure to help a few of their fellow men in need. They felt that they had done only that which it was their duty to do.