

The Hands of War, Like the Bony Hands of Death, Grip Pitcairn Island.

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WHAT has happened to the world?"

Little forlorn Pitcairn Island, whose 215 inhabitants have been left to slow starvation, is wondering. They are victims of a war which they probably haven't heard of yet and may never live to hear about.

All they know is that long months have passed without a ship stopping, or even a passing plume of smoke appearing on the horizon.

After the tiny South Sea islet was made famous by the book and picture of "Mutiny on the Bounty," the big outside world which these descendants of the old mutineers had only heard about did a very nice thing. It presented them with a short-wave radio set, Station VR6AY, which was able to talk with Mrs. Dorothy Hall, radio amateur, of Springfield, Long Island, N. Y.

But one of the last visiting ships took their precious set away for repairs and that was the last they have heard of it.

The radio apparatus is at Panama, all fixed and ready, but the islanders will probably not see it again or perhaps any ship until the end of the war. If this war lasts as long as the last one, what will that first ship find?

Perhaps a lot of famished or dead people and a multitude of black rats.

These rats are one of the main reasons why Pitcairn Island is not the South Sea paradise it has been described as being, but rather a rocky trap on which human beings cannot survive indefinitely without food, medicine and other supplies from overseas.

By choosing that forbidding rock for their haven, the nine mutineers of the Bounty escaped hanging, but they sentenced themselves and their descendants to life imprisonment even beyond the third and fourth generation, which Divine wrath imposes on the lawbreaker. It may even be for this generation, a death sentence.

It will be slow starvation. When the weather is right they can launch their boats in treacherous Bounty Bay and catch fish. But the entire catch must be eaten at once, since they have no way of preventing it from spoiling immediately in that hot, moist climate. Also they have a few goats and chickens, whose milk and eggs help keep the babies from dying in infancy, and there are one or two coconut palms.

Oranges they have in superabundance, so much so, that the children learn to hate orange juice before they are old enough to talk. It is the Pitcairn youngster's equivalent of spinach.

Mrs. Hall, who for a long time was the voice of the outside world to the little dot of rock lost in the vastness of the Pacific Ocean, has heard their daily problems and probably knows the people better than most anyone else. She explains why they do not balance their diet with vegetables grown in the fertile patches to be found in the island's uneven soil.

Mrs. Hall says:

"The islanders cannot plant potatoes and other vegetables, for before these have time to reach a size large enough to make them worth eating, an army of rats comes in the night, pulls them all up and devours them. Farmers have their scarecrows, but nobody has found a way to scare or keep out the huge Pitcairn rat.

"Therefore, most everything must be imported except oranges, melons and a few other fruits. Most of the necessary food used to be gotten by barter with Tahiti. In exchange for the luscious Pitcairn oranges the Tahitians shipped coconuts and beans, but little else. It was almost enough, for the precious beans supplied vegetable protein. What they lacked was animal protein. The Pit-

cairn islander's happiest dream is sitting down to a feast of meat.

"Meat, however, must be brought by ships traveling either from England or New Zealand. The islanders trade for tinned meats, but having no refrigeration, the meat goes bad if left exposed to the air for very long. Yet so ravenous are the natives for it that they take a chance, and therefore ptomaine poisoning is one of their most common complaints. There is no doctor on the island and few medical supplies to speak of."

These medical supplies perhaps should be spoken of, since they are what might be called "museum pieces." They consist of a shelf-load of dust-covered bottles, mostly sent ashore by captains of ships in the long ago. Their ancient labels have long since become illegible with age. If someone were able to guess what is in them, nobody on the island has the medical understanding to administer the stuff, and even if they did, probably the drugs have lost their potency.

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Nevertheless, they are treasured, under lock and key, along with the rudder of the old *Bounty*, which years ago was fished out of the sea. The British Government has forbidden the islanders to sell this historic memento of the sea's most daring mutiny.

The big rats which plague the island are something of a mystery. Apparently they were not there when the mutineers and their Tahitian wives took possession. Unquestionably the *Bounty*, like all ships of those pre-fumigation days, swarmed with them. When the *Bounty* was burned and scuttled, presumably none of them swam ashore because there were no complaints during the first half

century or so of occupancy by the mutineers.

Certainly none swam ashore from any of the visiting ships, because these dare not lie to nearer than a mile and a half from the treacherous shore. The islanders go out to the ships in their own open boats which have to be small enough to be hauled up on dry land when not in use. Possibly a pair of rats managed to hide in one of the small return cargoes and get ashore unobserved, although this is hard to imagine. Perhaps a pair came ashore on some floating wreckage.

The island rodent is not the common wharf and ship rat, well-known to sailors the world over. It is an ancient species, rapidly becoming extinct. The Pitcairn rat is the black one which first succeeded in more or less domesticating man. It sailed on Pharaoh's galleys and went to Troy with crafty Ulysses, and to the Crusades with Richard the Lion Heart.

It is the same black rat which brought the germs of the black plague from the Orient to Europe during the Middle Ages. But, within modern times, the grey rat has taken to the sea and is rapidly driving its predecessor from the face of the earth. Pitcairn Island is no paradise for man but it certainly is a sanctuary for the black rat.

A rat is meat; and though detestable, is digestible, as proved during the siege of Paris in the Franco-Prussian War and on many other occasions. The islanders however, have not been able to devise effective rat-traps, mostly because of metal shortage. As for ammunition, what little they have is treasured like gold. The shortage of metals is due to the shortage of water. There is no spring or well on the island which, like the Rock of Gibraltar, is wholly dependent on rain water.

There is no lack of rain, in fact during what corresponds to Winter, it does little else but rain, converting the place into glistening rocks and a waste of clay mud, but all this rainfall quickly runs away.

In order to catch enough for all purposes the houses are roofed with corrugated iron, instead of the usual tropical thatch. The water is carefully drained into barrels and cisterns. The iron rusts through from the underside and in spite of eternal vigilance, the replacement cost uses up almost all the island's pitiful little export balance over and above its barter for food with New Zealand.

Now, it cannot get any more for love or money.

The feeble trickle of money that used to come in before the war put an end to all commerce, was hoarded against purchases from mail-order houses and others who would not barter but insisted on cash. When not swapping with New Zealand sometimes the colony was able to make shipments of oranges at a profit of two shillings (50 cents) a crate. This was far from a net profit because they had to buy the crates and deduct depreciation on them. With each shipment therefore al-

ways went a fervent plea to the sailors to ask the stevedores to be gentle with the oranges so the crates would be returned undamaged.

But stevedores can't change their habits for a few wretched strangers far away.

Local transactions between natives are almost exclusively a matter of credit and barter, with very little money changing hands. Taxes, such as there are, are mostly in the form of labor, fish, and most anything but currency. One thing however, must be paid for, strictly cash in advance—matrimony.

When a man feels like marrying he is not expected to ask the girl; and if he does, it has no significance legally and officially. He must get her parents' consent. This done, he pays the sum of five shillings (\$1.25) into the community treasury, for which he is entitled to post on the doors of the community hall a written notice announcing the banns.

After that has been there four weeks, they may marry.

At any time within that period, if the youth changes his mind, he may pull down the notice, take it inside and get back three shillings of his original five. The girl has no right to tear it down nor has she any legal redress in the way of a breach-of-promise claim.

Heart-balm suits are unknown at Pitcairn and so are divorces. Every boy and girl have known each other since they were babies, they are all at least cousins, therefore the colony sees no excuse for making a mistake for any reason, with such

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few selections, for thinking that a second choice would be any better.

In spite of their intermarriage for 150 years, the colonists are a fairly sturdy, healthy lot,

with none of the degenerative diseases supposed to arise from inbreeding.

Strangely enough, the only common defect is bad teeth, the very thing which in prosperous, civilized countries is usually blamed to soft, refined foods of which these people know nothing. Presumably it is an hereditary defect handed down from the original handful of mutineers, and perhaps aggravated by unbalanced diet. It seems to be one more bit of evi-

dence that the so-called "natural life" is unnatural to the modern human being.

Though it has no doctor, the island might, considering the tooth situation, have felt itself lucky that there was a dentist among its members. Instead, he happened to be its most unpopular inhabitant. For one thing, he came there uninvited from New Zealand and the islanders are as clannish as any royal family of Europe.

Also his usefulness was considerably impaired by the fact that he had soon used up his drugs, cements for fillings and other supplies, and had no money with which to replace them. Therefore, about all he could do for his disapproving patients was pull their teeth without any form of anesthetic.

For this thankless operation his fee was an I. O. U. for one fish, next time there was a catch. When that catch came the dentist and everyone else on the island had more fish than he could possibly eat before it spoiled. Under such circumstances it is a bit hard for any dentist to show a sunny disposition.

But the deepest cause for his unpopularity was that, justly or unjustly, he was blamed for a previous condition much like what confronts the island today. For months the little community mysteriously found itself a pariah, shunned by everything afloat. Finally they discovered that a typhoid epidemic was supposed to be raging on the island. It took some time to convince the ports from which ships that might pass Pitcairn sail, that there was no truth in the story.

Later the island's Chief Magistrate announced

that he had satisfied himself that the dentist, boarding a visiting ship, had told the captain that the place was full of typhoid, just because a score of the natives happened to be sick abed with a somewhat unusual form of the common tropical dysentery.

Quite likely the Pitcairn people are now blaming their dentist for what is really the fault of the war. Ships that stop at Pitcairn are bound to be small tramps and do so more from curiosity and kindness than any hope of profit.

These rusty little craft carry no doctor, and should any contagious disease be caught from the island, it might be a serious matter for the crew and officers before they could reach port for medical care, to say nothing of the loss of time and money in quarantine. One can hardly blame them for being on the cautious side.

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Four years ago, before the false alarm about typhoid, Pitcairn became a pariah, for the solid reason that an epidemic of measles was so rampant there that it killed 93 of the populace. So desperate were some of the stricken that they begged to take some of the contents of the ancient, unmarked medicine bottles, in the wild hope that possibly they might happen to pick something that would be good for measles. They seem to be without much nursing skill which, added to the lack of doctor and medicines, makes life risky even when there is no epidemic.

Mrs. Hall says:

"When someone breaks a leg he or she must wait until a ship comes and if, as usually happens, it is one that does not carry a doctor, wait some more. When Andrew Young, the island's radio operator, got his index finger smashed by his boat's rudder, infection set in. It was many weeks before a ship with a surgeon passed and by that time all the surgeon could do was amputate it. He was lucky not to have lost his life by blood-poisoning.

"One of the daughters of the Chief Magistrate fell out of a tree and injured her back. It was six weeks before they could get her to New Zealand

and when she returned it was as a hopeless cripple. One of her thoughts as they brought the woman back was how she would break the news to her own little daughter that her mother would never be able to walk again.

"But the child was not among the group standing on the shore beyond the breakers as the boat was brought in. They accompanied the mother to a little new grave in the cemetery. While she was away in New Zealand, another ship had stopped and let the islanders have some canned beef—which they left too long exposed to the air, with the inevitable result.

"The islanders were warned to be careful about eating it but, driven by their meat-hunger, they took a chance on eating it. The little girl had been among the unlucky and died of ptomaine poisoning. Yet, some people think it a paradise because there are no steam heat and landlords.

"When the war started, most freight traffic in the South Seas stopped, and without this traffic the islanders cannot hope to live indefinitely. Nothing but humanitarian motives will bring a ship to Pitcairn now, and in a world war humanitarian projects have to be weighed carefully as to their probable results. In any such weighing the unhappy island is bound to be found wanting.

"The amount of money required to save only about 200 islanders would place ambulances at the front and save many times that number of lives of wounded soldiers. Britain's first duty is to her own soldiers. Even if a rescue flight from Australia or New Zealand could be financed, where would they get a plane when the Government needs everything of the kind there is to win the war?

"The islanders have almost no reserve assets to withstand this unintentional but terribly-effective war blockade. Having almost no money at all they have depended mostly on 'good Samaritans' to furnish them with clothes, books and other luxuries.' By 'luxuries' I do not mean such things as cigarettes and lipsticks. These people consider

such things as needles and thread, in fact anything without which it is possible to exist, as luxuries.

"The radio set on which Andrew Young talked to me was donated and sent to Pitcairn by radio companies for publicity purposes—but they forgot to send extra parts. It came about through a radio operator telling a radio company of the pitiful attempts of Young with a little set which could just barely whisper out ten miles to any ship that happened to pass that near. So Young and his community were rewarded by a real set, over which I talked constantly with Andrew Young, until he began to have trouble, and finally, the 'voice of Pitcairn' died utterly.

"When the set began to break down I told him to ship it by the next boat to Panama where some radio amateurs I know would fix it. Much of this I had to arrange by mail. The last letter I received from Pitcairn was on August 20th and the set was at that time in Panama and was scheduled for shipping back on September 3rd. But war was declared and the ship that was to have passed Pitcairn to drop off the repaired transmitter found it had to alter its course and could not stop at the island.

"The set is still in Panama and the islanders are probably wondering what will become of them without it.

"I don't see how they can know that a war has broken out and, even if they have guessed it, I doubt if they would realize how a conflict between nations on the other side of the earth might dislocate traffic on their part of the globe.

"The only way to save themselves would be to put their children, sick and injured, in their few little open boats and head for Tahiti, largest of the Society Islands group. This voyage in such tiny cockle shells across 1,800 miles of deserted seas is not a pleasant thing to contemplate, but with luck they might make it.

"With still more luck these moneyless people

might be able to borrow a sailing vessel big enough to go back with and rescue the rest of the colony.

"This would probably be some old fishing smack so unseaworthy that its owner no longer cared to risk his life in it. But with patching up and a lot more luck, they might get away with it. The worst of it is that, not knowing why they are neglected this time, the islanders may keep on hoping and waiting until they have neither strength nor provisions left for the long, dangerous venture."

Another person who knows Pitcairn, and not only through his ears as does Mrs. Hall but also his eyes, is Lewis S. Bellem, Jr., who visited the lonesome rock to help install the radio transmitter whose loss is so tragic in the present emergency. He says:

"In the nine weeks I spent on Pitcairn Island I witnessed an appalling state of affairs and found that even today the islanders are 'paying' for the crime of the Bounty and that they are fully conscious of it. It might fittingly be renamed, 'Penance Island.' Every word and action of the natives seems to reflect a

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desire to atone at last for what they call 'the great sin' of their ancestors, a century and a half ago.

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"A rigid moral system has been observed for the last hundred years, enough, one would think, to have atoned for all the sins in the calendar, but there seems to be in their minds no statute of limitations against the mutiny on the Bounty. The man who put the colony on this rigorous moral basis was John Adams, who outlived all the other eight mutineers. Conscience stricken and tormented by remorse, in his old age, he managed to convert the colony to a creed something like that of the Seventh Day Adventists.

"No islander smokes or drinks, though drink is one of the few luxuries which this penniless people can make without cost or importing anything. Quiet, brave, rarely complaining under conditions which would be unbearable to anyone else I ever knew, the natives try to make the best of things. In parties of fifteen to eighteen men, with sometimes a woman or two, they set sail in their little open boats for the French Island of Mangareva, 300 miles away, where the Malay natives, as poor as themselves, may have nothing to swap for their oranges, but always there is the chance that they might have a coat, a pair of shoes, a bit of metal or even a phonograph record, preferably religious, which would make the trip worth while.

"Ships stop more often at Mangareva and therefore these sailor discards are more plentiful.

"The nearest land of any sort to Pitcairn is Henderson Island which is uninhabited and 100 miles away. But they often go there to gather wood for the carved canes, boxes and other trinkets which they are able to trade, though rarely for money.

"The Pitcairner's dreary day begins at dawn. Do they wake themselves up with a nice hot cup of coffee? They do not! There is no such thing on the island. Most of them will tell you that they know what it is because they have had it, and so they have, after a dreadful fashion. When they row out to the little tramp steamers whose time is not too valuable to prevent them from wasting some at Pitcairn, the cook throws some more water to boil on the old coffee grounds that are always simmering at the bottom of a huge pot on the back of his galley stove.

"In due course of time the cook pours out for each visitor a cupful of such bitter stuff that it would cause a riot in a Bowery boarding house and is one of the reasons why calling a man a 'son of a sea-cook' is a deadly insult on the ocean. But with a spoonful of condensed milk added, the islander sips it with delight. It is one of the high spots of his life, well worth the back-breaking row of a mile and a half each way.

"The islander fortifies himself for his long day with a nice long drink of tepid rain water. There is nothing else in the way

of food or drink for man, woman or child until 11 A. M., when everyone sits down to breakfast, which is usually beans in some form, but often is fish, and occasionally meat, a la ptomaine. On empty stomachs, the children go to school in a little shack called the school house, and they stay empty until that same eleven o'clock breakfast. They may always have an orange if they wish, which they usually don't.

"Pitcairn has 70-odd houses, mostly of the shanty type and all perched on posts to be clear of the rush of waters from the tropical downpours. Most houses have corrugated iron roofs to

"One thing found in almost every household might be rated as a luxury in most any other land, but on Pitcairn is in a class with the Bible. This is the phonograph, and nothing on the island struck me as more pathetic. It is an almost unvarying rule to play two or three hymns before retiring each night.

"Never will I forget one evening as I trudged from the radio shack to my quarters hearing the strains of something produced by a blunt needle from a worn-out record. In this island where everyone is poor beyond belief there are degrees of poverty. This family was so poor that it could not afford that absolute

goes there and never sends a representative for the good reason that he is located at Suva, in the Fiji Islands, 4,000 miles away. He manages to get occasional reports from captains of English ships who stop there.

"The local representative of the law is the Chief Magistrate, of all things, a lineal descendant of a ring leader of the mutiny, just as Andrew C. Young, only radio-minded man on the island, is descended from another of the nine mutineers of the *Bounty*. With the Chief Magistrate is a committee who frame the local laws which everyone unites in enforcing.

"These consist mostly of regulations for conserving the island's slender assets. In their misery they have reverted to a form of communism as peoples commonly do, in poverty and despair, as a last resort. Most everything from the fish catches to whatever may be obtained by barter from the ships is distributed by the committee. It is not necessary to keep books to remember what each family has gotten in these distributions for many years.

"Anyone can tell when it is the Sabbath on Pitcairn by looking at the islanders' feet. On that day and almost none other the grown-up native wears shoes, with rope soles and canvas tops made right on the island. Week-days the men, besides going barefoot, wear any sort of nondescript combination of unmatched coat, pants and vest that happened to have been dealt out to him in the various distributions of sailor's cast-off clothing.

"But for the Sabbath each man has cherished a carefully-pressed and spotless, if somewhat threadbare and shiny, uniform of an officer in some merchant marine discarded by someone on a visiting ship. They walk around garbed in the faded glories of captains, chief engineers and pursers.

"The women, having no uniforms, try to show respect for the Sabbath by wearing the best they have, including sometimes a pair of stockings and have to let it go at that.

"The weekday, barefoot habit is a serious matter when the big rains come and all Pitcairn is transformed into a sticky, slithering mess of clay. Such tin cans as have not been used for their precious metal are buried by order of the committee to prevent cutting those bare feet. But always the rain streams seem to find out the burial places and carry them where the islanders will step on them.

"A considerable percentage of the deaths on the island have been due to lockjaw from rainy-season infection of the feet.

"A Pitcairner brought me a magazine article and asked what the writer meant by an 'underprivileged person'. I told him I didn't know. How could I explain that the wretchedest pauper in the United States is a plutocrat compared with the richest native of Pitcairn.

"Paradise! It's a poorhouse."

(The End)



This Old Sketch of George Young, One of the *Bounty* Mutineers, With His Native Wife and Family, Depicts a Happy South Seas Existence That the Inhabitants Are Not Enjoying Today, Largely Because the War Is All But Starving Them Out.

catch that rain, the only water supply there is. The walls of all the homes are bright with the grinning faces of moving picture queens, cut from magazines after the last inhabitant has publicly admitted that he or she has read every word of them.

"And others are photographs of their friends mostly in America. These are friends whom they have never seen and never will, just shadowy, kindly beings who have corresponded and sent them things.

"The household equipment has a distinct naval character, consisting of slightly decrepit deck chairs and condemned dining saloon chairs. The slightly-chipped and cracked china often bears the names of merchant lines that have long been out of existence. The kitchen is a lean-to shack where meals are often prepared over open fires. The bread is baked in stone ovens which are preheated for hours before the dough is put in.

necessity of an iron roof, having only thatch. This meant that the head of the house must get water from one of his relatives and, since all are related, this could mean anyone.

"Through an uncurtained and unscreened window I saw the owner of the hut, in a dim glow probably from his fireplace. The sad resignation of the man's countenance was something I have never seen equalled in any painting. It made me stop and watch. For a full fifteen minutes he played that same record, some sort of organ piece, over and over. Evidently it was the only one he had and so worn that musically, it was almost a total loss. He had only a thatched roof, only one religious record, but he had a machine, it worked, and that was enough. He symbolized Pitcairn Island.

"The official ruler of this crumb of British soil is the British High Commissioner of the Western Pacific, but he never