



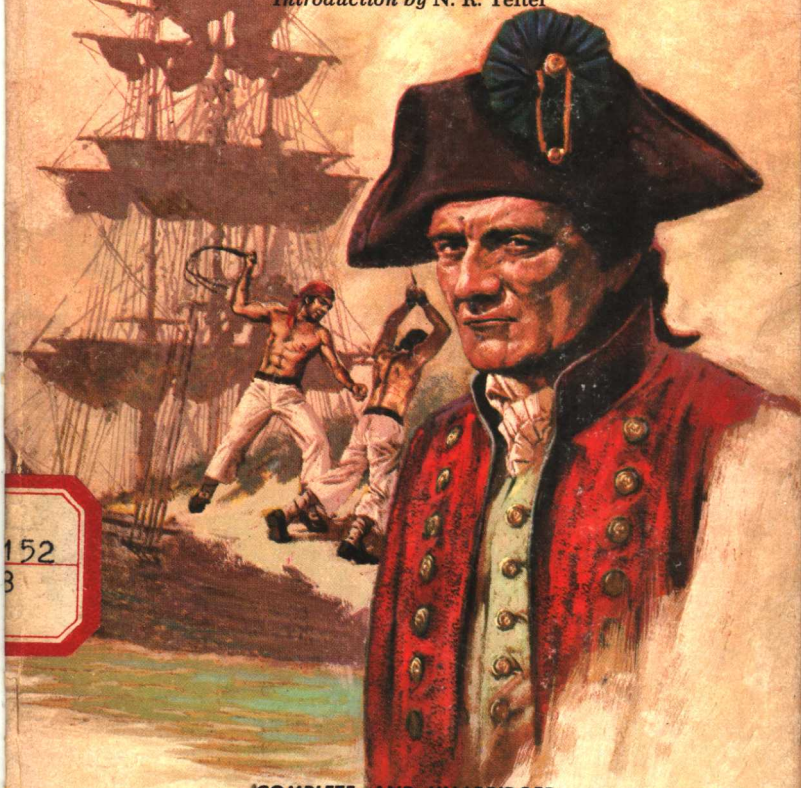
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CLASSICS SERIES CL88

# WILLIAM BLIGH

## THE MUTINY ON BOARD H.M.S. BOUNTY

*Introduction by N. R. Teitel*



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\*COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

# **THE MUTINY ON BOARD H.M.S. BOUNTY**

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**WILLIAM BLIGH**

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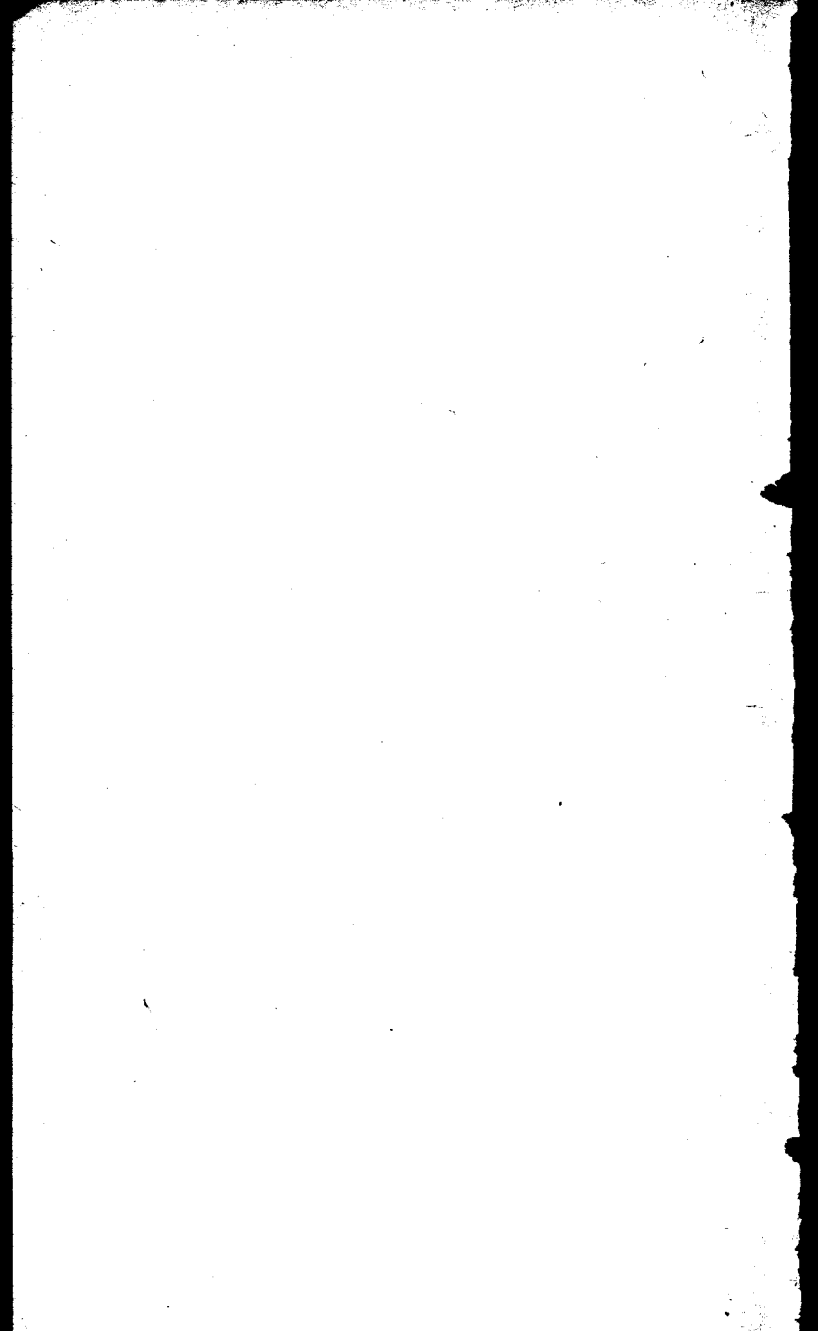
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# The Mutiny On Board H.M.S. Bounty



**WILLIAM BLIGH**

Introduction

The life of William Bligh beggars fiction. It strains our credulity, makes a mockery of fate, and is invested with paradox and irony. Both his partisans and detractors never question his Herculean courage and fortitude. It is the nature of the man himself that divides and baffles them. Small wonder. Bligh had the extraordinary capacity both to infuriate and to inspire. He seems larger than life, and much smaller. Perhaps he is best judged—if judged he must be—in his historical context. One thing is certain: he is not the complete monster as portrayed in Nordhoff and Hall's popular book, *Mutiny on the Bounty*. Nor is Mr. Charles Laughton's celebrated screen portrait of our singular hero etched in unvarnished truth. But then, the truth is hard to come by. All we can do is ferret out the facts—the conflicting facts, alas! The rest is conjecture—fascinating conjecture, but conjecture nevertheless.

He was born in 1754, in Plymouth, England. At the age of sixteen he went to sea—a sea over which the British navy ruled supreme. It was a navy of rigid class distinction, founded on tyrannical discipline and immutable law. The master of the ship was God's anointed. He was both judge and juror. There was no higher court of appeal. The unsavory crews—recruited from slums or pressed into service—were treated like something less than animals, subsisting on wretched food and living in even more wretched quarters. Hardly the ideal school for an impressionable boy. However,



young Bligh thrived. Five years later he sailed with the famous Captain Cook, who was seeking a northwest passage to India. From this illustrious, ill-fated man—he was killed by natives on an island in the South Pacific—Bligh learned the art of navigation—an art in which he was destined to excel. More than four years passed on the sea. On his return to England, he married Elizabeth Betham. (That their marriage was successful is evidenced from their letters.) England was at war, and Bligh was given command of a frigate that engaged in an indecisive action between an English and Dutch squadron near the Dogger Bank in the North Sea. The war ending, Lieut. Bligh commanded a number of merchant ships engaged in the West Indian trade. In 1787, at the urging of his friend and patron, Sir Joseph Banks, he assumed command of a 215-ton vessel named the *Bounty*. Tahitian breadfruit was to be its cargo—a cargo that was to be transplanted to the West Indies. Not that the West Indian planters wanted to beautify their landscape. They merely desired the cheapest possible food for their Negro slave-labor. The momentous voyage began on Christmas Eve. . . .

William Bligh's narrative is sober and precise. Rarely does any feeling or emotion disrupt the latitudes and longitudes, the soundings and the charts. His log is the work-record of a master mariner: a man who takes infinite pride in his craft and its traditions. Not for him the wild, poetic imaginings of an Ahab. He is humorless, and hopelessly matter-of-fact. He lives by a few simple rules: the sea is a stealthy, implacable enemy that gives no quarter, and the men under his command are mere instruments to be used or ill-used as he sees fit. Miraculously, however, some sensibility seeps into these pages, some rare instances of feeling and emotion.

The first four chapters are coldly clinical. The breadfruit is described with exactitude, the complement of the ship is itemized, and the log entries begin. The *Bounty* fights its way through the South Atlantic. After months of battering, and much soul-searching on the part of its master, the limping vessel is spared the almost impossible task of rounding Cape Horn in mountainous seas. She now threads her way for Africa and the Cape of Good Hope. Thirty-eight days are spent in Cape Town. The ship is caulked, and the sails and rigging are repaired. Bligh makes specific mention of the fact that all his men had received a daily supply of fresh meat, with soft bread, and plenty of vegetables during their stay. The *Bounty* proceeds to the Island of St. Paul, arrives in

Adventure Bay, sails from Van Dieman's Land, and finally reaches its port of call—Tahiti—in mid-October, 1788.

It is interesting to note that in the opening chapters Bligh makes oblique mention of his trust in Fletcher Christian, one of his mates. He also takes great pride—as well he might—in the astounding good health of his crew. One of Bligh's less-endearing characteristics is his zealous need—in his narrative—to explain away or balance any one of his unreasonable acts with an obviously reasonable one. This, from Chapter Two: "As it was my wish to proceed to Otahetie (Tahiti) without stopping, I ordered every body to be at two-thirds allowance of bread: I also directed the water for drinking to be filtered through dripstones that I had bought at Teneriffe for that purpose." Unfortunately for Mr. Bligh, there was another writer aboard the *Bounty*. Mr. James Morrison, boatswain's mate, kept a diary—always a dangerous weapon. From it, we glean some rather unpleasant facts concerning the skipper. He had a choleric temper, dispensed short rations, and was thought to have stolen some of the ship's provisions. Substantial charges, if true. But true or untrue, they would hardly make for a "tractable"—Bligh's own description—company of men. Undoubtedly, Bligh ruled with a heavy hand, and undoubtedly, too, his men were more than restive after having been cooped up for more than ten months on a sea that had stretched 27,086 miles.

To the work-weary, storm-tossed, hungry men Tahiti was Heaven, Paradise, a Garden of Eden—and so much more! Beneficent skies, a superabundance of food, kind and gentle natives, and above all—willing women. (Bligh calls them "wanton.") An incredible island of riches—theirs for the taking. And take they did! Uninhibited dalliance was the rule, not the exception. An outcast, a purse-snatcher, a cut-throat—all could strut like kings—when Bligh wasn't looking. Six months rush by. Six months of pleasure, indolence, and freedom. (The breadfruit trees did manage to get collected—1,015 of them.) Bligh is at his best in his description of Tahiti and its natives. Though still the snob and harsh taskmaster, the ice of his prose becomes somewhat uncongealed. Particularly pleasing is his account of native customs, sports, and personal relationships. He does find time, however, to flog three men for desertion. Moreover, even his officers are derelict in their duties. Pride keeps Bligh from mentioning this in his narrative. Nevertheless, the stay in Tahiti is the one bright spot in this otherwise harrowing tale. It is always instructive, amusing, and fascinating. The *Bounty* leaves

Tahiti on April 4, 1789. A smouldering crew bends once more under the yoke. But now there is a big difference. They have tasted of the fruits of Paradise and are reluctant to say goodbye.

The vessel is well out to sea when the mutiny bursts forth. Planned or spontaneous—the evidence is conflicting—Fletcher Christian is its undoubted ringleader. This young gentleman, well-born and highly connected, is reckless, ardent, and exceedingly fond of women. Mr. Bligh and nineteen of his crew are cast adrift in an open boat on a merciless sea. Their provisions are less than scanty, their weapons few. Death seems inevitable. The odds for survival are a thousand to one. But William Bligh hasn't heard the odds. With only a compass and a quadrant, and with an inferior crew, he steers for the nearest haven—Timor, in the Dutch East Indies—a mere 3,600 miles away!

Were Bligh Satan himself, one cannot but help cheer the man on. His seamanship—extraordinary as it was—is by now taken for granted. It is the personality of the man that wins us: his dogged courage and superb leadership. The narrative is free of imprecation and whining. There is a tremendous job to be done, and Bligh ingeniously and unsparingly pits his knowledge and craft against everything the elements hurl at him. Despotism, yes—but only because he has to be. At times he almost seems like a mother hen caring for her young. Living conditions are impossible. They are wracked by hunger and thirst. (A few stray birds are caught. Bligh carefully but fairly apportions them, as he does the dwindling water supply.) Brief respites are snatched at various islands while the search for food goes on. But always Bligh pushes on. Finally, at long last, the pitiable boat—with its cargo of skeletons—arrives at the Island of Timor after a passage of forty-seven unending days and nights. Most remarkable of all was the fact that only one man had been lost, and he was killed by natives.

The rest of the narrative is anticlimactic. The horrendous ordeal eventually takes its toll. Even Bligh the indestructible becomes ill, but recovers. (He is destined for more amazing adventures and yet another mutiny.) He boards a Dutch ship with two of his crew and arrives in England. Of the nineteen members of his company, twelve survive. Two years and three months have been consumed by the ill-starred voyage. Bligh's story was first published in 1790. (The present narrative, an enlarged edition, was published in 1792.) Public interest and response was tremendous. Bligh, charged with losing the *Bounty*, was court-martialed and acquitted.

Then, irony of ironies, he was sent on yet another breadfruit expedition!

William Bligh and Fletcher Christian have become legends. (Some of the latter's descendants still dwell on Pitcairn Island.) Both men were marked by history; both men are destined to live forever in the turbulent annals of the sea.

NATHAN R. TEITEL  
*Lecturer*  
New York University

## AUTHOR'S ADVERTISEMENT

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AT THE time I published the Narrative of the Mutiny on Board the Bounty, it was my intention that the preceding part of the Voyage should be contained in a separate account. This method I have since been induced to alter. The reason of the Narrative appearing first, was for the purpose of communicating early information concerning an event which had attracted the public notice: and being drawn up in a hasty manner, it required many corrections. Some circumstances likewise were omitted; and the notation of time used in the Narrative, being according to sea reckoning, in which the days begin and end at noon, must have produced a degree of obscurity and confusion to readers accustomed only to the civil mode. And this would have increased, as the remainder of the voyage, on account of the numerous shore occurrences at Otaheite and elsewhere, could not, with clearness and propriety, have been related in any other than the usual manner of reckoning.

Besides remedying these inconveniences, I have thought a fuller account of our passage from Timor to Europe, than that contained in the Narrative, would not be unacceptable. These reasons, with the manifest convenience of comprising the whole Voyage in one continued narrative, in preference to letting it appear in disjointed accounts, will, it is hoped, be allowed a sufficient excuse for having varied from the original intention. Nevertheless, for the accommodation of the purchasers of the Narrative already published, those who desire it, will be supplied with the other parts of the Voyage separate; i.e. the part previous to the mutiny, and the additional account after leaving Timor.

## Chapter 1

### PLAN OF THE EXPEDITION—OUTFIT, AND OCCURRENCES TO THE TIME OF LEAVING ENGLAND—DESCRIPTION OF THE BREAD-FRUIT

The King having been graciously pleased to comply with a request from the merchants and planters interested in his Majesty's West India possessions, that the bread-fruit tree might be introduced into those islands, a vessel, proper for the undertaking, was bought, and taken into dock at Deptford, to be provided with the necessary fixtures and preparations for executing the object of the voyage. These were completed according to a plan of my much honoured friend, Sir Joseph Banks, which, in the event, proved the most advantageous that could have been adopted for the intended purpose.

The ship was named the *Bounty*: I was appointed to command her on the 16th of August 1787. Her burthen was nearly 215 tons; her extreme length on deck, 90 feet 10 inches; extreme breadth, 24 feet 3 inches; and height in the hold under the beams, at the main hatchway, 10 feet 3 inches. In the cockpit were the cabins of the surgeon, gunner, botanist, and clerk, with a steward-room and store-rooms. The between decks was divided in the following manner:—the great cabin was appropriated for the preservation of the plants, and extended as far forward as the after hatchway. It had two large sky-lights, and on each side three scuttles for air, and was fitted with a false floor cut full of holes to contain the garden-pots, in which the plants were to be brought home. The deck was covered with lead, and at the foremost corners of the cabin were fixed pipes to carry off the water that drained from the plants, into tubs placed below to save it for future use. I had a small cabin on one side to sleep in, adjoining to the great cabin, and a place near the middle of the ship to eat in. The bulk-head of this apartment was at the afterpart of the main hatchway, and on each side of it were

the berths of the mates and midshipmen; between these berths the arms-chest was placed. The cabin of the master, in which was always kept the key of the arms, was opposite to mine. This particular description of the interior parts of the ship is rendered necessary by the event of the expedition.

The ship was masted according to the proportion of the navy; but, on my application, the masts were shortened, as I thought them too much for her, considering the nature of the voyage.

On the 3d of September, the ship came out of dock; but the carpenters and joiners remained on board much longer, as they had a great deal of work to finish.

The next material alteration made in the fitting out, was, lessening the quantity of iron and other ballast.—I gave directions that only 19 tons of iron should be taken on board instead of the customary proportion, which was 45 tons. The stores and provisions I judged would be fully sufficient to answer the purpose of the remainder; for I am of opinion, that many of the misfortunes which attend ships in heavy storms of wind, are occasioned by too much dead weight in their bottoms.

The establishment of men and officers for the ship were as follows:

- 1 Lieutenant to command
- 1 Master
- 1 Boatswain
- 1 Gunner
- 1 Carpenter
- 1 Surgeon
- 2 Master's Mates
- 2 Midshipmen
- 2 Quarter Masters
- 1 Quarter Master's Mate
- 1 Boatswain's Mate
- 1 Gunner's Mate
- 1 Carpenter's Mate
- 1 Carpenter's Crew
- 1 Sailmaker
- 1 Armourer
- 1 Corporal
- 1 Clerk and Steward
- 23 Able Seamen

Two skilful and careful men were appointed, at Sir Joseph Banks's recommendation, to have the management of the plants intended to be brought home: the one, David Nelson, who had been on similar employment in Captain Cook's last voyage; the other, William Brown, as an assistant to him.—With these two our whole number amounted to forty-six.

It was proposed, that our route to the Society Islands should be round Cape Horn; and the greatest dispatch became necessary, as the season was already far advanced: but the shipwrights not being able to complete their work by the time the ship was ready in other respects, our sailing was unavoidably retarded. However, by the 4th of October the pilot came on board to take us down the river; on the 9th we fell down to Long Reach, where we received our gunner's stores, and guns, four four-pounders and ten swivels.

The ship was stored and victualled for eighteen months. In addition to the customary allowance of provisions, we were supplied with sour krout, portable soup, essence of malt, dried malt, and a proportion of barley and wheat in lieu of oatmeal. I was likewise furnished with a quantity of iron-work and trinkets, to serve in our intercourse with the natives in the South Seas: and from the board of Longitude I received a time-keeper, made by Mr. Kendal.

On the 15th I received orders to proceed to Spithead; but the winds and weather were so unfavourable that we did not arrive there till the 4th of November. On the 24th I received from Lord Hood, who commanded at Spithead, my final orders. The wind, which for several days before had been favourable, was now turned directly against us. On the 28th the ship's company received two months pay in advance, and on the following morning we worked out to St. Helen's, where we were obliged to anchor.

We made different unsuccessful attempts to get down Channel, but contrary winds and bad weather constantly forced us back to St. Helen's, or Spithead, until Sunday the 23rd of December, when we sailed with a fair wind.

During our stay at Spithead, the rate of the time-piece was several times examined by Mr. Bailey's observations at the Portsmouth observatory. On the 19th of December, the last time of its being examined on shore, it was 1' 52", 5 too fast for mean time, and then losing at the rate of 1", 1 per day; and at this rate I estimate its going when we sailed.

The object of all the former voyages to the South Seas, undertaken by the command of his present majesty, has been the advancement of science, and the increase of knowledge. This voyage may be reckoned the first, the intention of which



has been to derive benefit from those distant discoveries. For the more fully comprehending the nature and plan of the expedition, and that the reader may be possessed of every information necessary for entering on the following sheets, I shall here lay before him a copy of the instructions I received from the admiralty, and likewise a short description of the bread-fruit.

*By the Commissioners for executing the office  
of Lord High Admiral of Great Britain and  
Ireland, &c.*

WHEREAS the king, upon a representation from the merchants and planters interested in his majesty's West India possessions, that the introduction of the bread-fruit trees into the islands of those seas, to constitute an article of food, would be of very essential benefit to the inhabitants, hath, in order to promote the interests of so respectable a body of his subjects (especially in an instance which promises general advantage) thought fit that measures should be taken for the procuring some of those trees, and conveying them to the said West India islands: And whereas the vessel under your command hath, in consequence thereof, been stored and victualled for that service, and fitted with proper conveniences and necessaries for the preservation of as many of the said trees as, from her size, can be taken on board her; and you have been directed to receive on board her the two gardeners [David Nelson and William Brown], who from their knowledge of trees and plants, have been hired for the purpose of selecting such as shall appear to be of a proper species and size:

You are, therefore, in pursuance of his majesty's pleasure, signified to us by Lord Sydney, one of his principal secretaries of state, hereby required and directed to put to sea in the vessel you command, the first favourable opportunity of wind and weather, and proceed with her, as expeditiously as possible round Cape Horn, to the Society Islands, situate in the Southern ocean, in the latitude of about  $18^{\circ}$  S, and longitude of about  $210^{\circ}$  E, from Greenwich, where, according to the accounts given by the late Captain Cook, and persons who accompanied him during his voyages, the bread-fruit tree is to be found in the most luxuriant state.

Having arrived at the above-mentioned islands, and taken on board as many trees and plants as may be thought neces-