

**THE RIDDLE
OF THE
*CASWELL MUTINY***

SÉAMUS BREATHNACH

The Riddle of the Caswell Mutiny

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DEDICATION

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Seamus Breathnach
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INTRODUCTION

Fear of the contingency of life is part of the human condition. While controlling some things that govern our lives we acknowledge the existence of other forces about which we can do little or nothing. In every walk of life people have to make choices, even when they are not in full possession of the facts. In this sense each of us enters endless relations without our will, knowing that we never have full possession of ‘all the facts.’

This fact of life is no less true for sailors, who live a life at sea, and in the 1870s they had their own peculiar concerns with which to cope. For our purposes -- which is to locate the parameters in which the story of the *Caswell* mutiny can best be related -- these concerns can be reduced to four. There was the possible fear of redundancy or displacement and/or a diminution of a sailor’s self-esteem (brought about by the development of steam). There was the definite fear of death (arising out of the ordinary and every day hazards of service on the high seas). There was also the constant apprehension of government on board a ship, which means, possible cruelty or personal violence from above (captain and mates) or rebellion from below (able bodied seamen), the one no doubt arising from the fear of the other. And finally, there was the sometime fear of racism, violence, or mutiny amongst one’s fellow crewmembers.

These four concerns apply exclusively in peacetime and were above and beyond the rigors of the sailor’s ordinary life at sea. One doubts whether we can understand a sailor’s lot in the 1870s; but if we look at these individual loci of possible apprehension, we may the more easily come to terms with comprehending something of what it must have been like.

Sail, Steam and the Suez Canal

With the European colonization of overseas territories came a dramatic increase in international trade from the mid-18th century onwards. Trading ships sailed along recognised trade routes, including the monsoon and wind corridors of the world. Perhaps the two greatest inventions, which impacted on imperial commerce, were steam and the telegraph. First developed in Britain at the end of the 17th century by Henry Newcomen, steam was further improved by James Watt in 1769, and was used in

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ships in the early 1800s. Even if it initially needed coal stations, steam-powered vessels improved reliability and speed. They were also ingeniously free from the constraints imposed by winds and tides. The fear of displacement by steam was probably the most general and the least immediate of a sailor's concerns. It is evident to us in the twenty first century that sail was eventually destined to be replaced by steam and, eventually, by nuclear power. In retrospect these progressive signs were unmistakable.

To take but two obvious if preliminary examples all we need do is to consider the enormous growth in the military and commercial use of ships or recall the opening of the Suez Canal.

Steam's greatest assault on sail arose -- not surprisingly -- from its military potential. Throughout history the military demand for innovation persisted apace with the drive for national and international power. The sole purpose of 'a man of war' was to carry guns. In size, as well as in science, the deep focus of the State was on a ship's military capacity. Henry VII's most famous ship the 'Great Harry' or '*Henri grace a Dieu*', weighed 1,000 tons, carried 349 soldiers, and housed 301 mariners and 50 gunners. That was in 1514. By adding 85 sea-going vessels to his fleet, Henry managed to hold the balance of power in Europe.

The value of sail-power or sea-power was never to be forgotten by the British. By logical extension it initially translated into the equation that more sails invariably meant more guns and better and bigger ships. Innovations were devoutly to be wished, and in the 1770s, copper plating was introduced to make the fleet firmer and faster. In the 1830s experiments in steam at Chatham began the eclipse of sail from a military standpoint, and by 1860 the *Warrior*, an iron clad teak warship, virtually made everything else obsolete. Its single-engine steam capacity only operated when challenged -- otherwise it sailed as a simple deterrent, concealing its prototypical capacity, at first as a steam-ship, but eventually as a nuclear submarine or as an Air Carrier. Hardly had the dust settled on the arguments about where to put paddles and propellers, when nuclear power found its way into the one-time coal bunkers.

But while nuclear power was some distance away in 1876. If we look at the contemporary ships, we find that most were concerned with size and capacity. The latest ships -- the HMS *Baccanta* and *Boadicea*, for example, had been newly launched at Portsmouth, while the HMS *Euralus* was still under construction at Chatham. These weren't ironclads of the line, but rather swift unarmored corvettes used (like the *Nelson* off the Clyde)

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for cruising as well as 'looking after merchant vessels.' The more mature ships ranged from 3000 tons (the HMS *Volage*) to 5782 tons (the HMS *Inconstant*). Between this 3000-5782 ton-range lay others like HMS *Euralus*, which, while under construction in 1876, had a projected weight of 4070 tons; its engines propelling at 5250 indicated horsepower. The *Euralus* was expected to carry sixteen guns -- fourteen 4-and-a-half tons, and two 64-pounders, as well as a range of torpedoes. Its length between perpendiculars was 280 feet, its extreme breadth 45 ft 6 ins. and its depth in hold 15 ft 3 ins. It was being built to carry 400 tons of coals and its complement of officers and men was no less than 350. Already over three-and-a-half years had been spent on her construction, her keel having been laid on March 15, 1873. And by October '76 she was as yet little more than half finished.

However impressive these military-type ships were, perhaps the best statistic to demonstrate how far the capacity for British shipbuilding had come was to be found on the Clyde; for nowhere had the shipbuilding industry flourished more than on the Clyde, which, in November 1876, employed no less than 40,000 workers. Not only that, but it was reckoned at that time that the Clyde's shipyards alone could re-build the whole of the British fleet in no more than two years.

There is no denying that coincident with steam came the widening of the world's waterways. Accordingly, in November 1869, the opening of Suez (forever associated with the Slave's Chorus in Verdi's *Aida*) celebrated the 'shortcut' to the East. This meant that steamers, now loading up with coal at Gibraltar, Port Said, and Aden, enjoyed an enduring advantage over the sailing ship. However glorious the history of sail is, in the 1870s it appeared to many that, for the first time, sail's lucrative commerce was not just threatened, but was in time displaceable. Fortunately this did not happen suddenly, nor was it considered a realistic threat to the clippers of the '70s.

The worth of a small vessel like that of the *Caswell*, with a respective net and gross weight of 499 and 517 tons, can only be gauged against the undeniable thrust for bigger, better and more efficient ships. But just as it would be foolish to deny the State's military expectations, so, too, would it be equally foolish to exaggerate the effects of those expectations. In the civil and commercial world of the 1870s, far from being threatened by steam, sailing barques like the *Caswell* were at the peak of commercial demand and were prized accordingly.

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Before Suez, for example, sail tonnage reached a high of 4.6 million tons, whereas steam -- by gradual improvements -- shipped only 0.8 million tons. Even five years after the Suez Canal opened -- that is three years before the *Caswell* mutiny occurred -- sail carried 4.1 million tons to steam's 1.68 million. Aided by colonial wool, jute from Calcutta, and grain from San Francisco, sail held its own and even made a comeback.

As Basil Lubbock has convincingly argued (in *The Last of the Wind-jammers* (vol. 111, Glasgow, 1975), it was only in the eighties and nineties that sail's great markets finally surrendered to improved steam. In the nineties the demand for large steel windjammers was undeniable, but this was twenty years after the *Caswell* mutiny, and even then, the four-mast barques could still give the steamers a run for their money on the open seas.

In the 1870s, therefore, the eventual if dismal destiny of sail may have been visible but was not as yet felt except in the most rarified circles. For most people, steam merely pronounced the value of sail as a commercial venture, and, under its competitive stimulus, says Lubbock, 'Sail came to its perfection'. The clippers of the seventies were reckoned to be the most beautiful ever launched, the most perfect being that composite of wood and iron called the *Torrens*, an Adelaide passenger ship launched the same year as the *Caswell*. The *Caswell*, of course, was no less elegant if built for cargo, and, if not superior to the American Cape Horners launched in the eighties, she was perfectly admirable in her time.

That being the case, one might have expected the captain of the *Caswell* (and the owners and the insurers) to pay due attention to the selection of crewmembers as well as to their treatment and well-being. The commercial status of the *Caswell* deserved no less. And since both of these matters were firmly in the hands of the captain, much depended on his personality and judgment.

Hazards on the High Seas

So, if the sailor had no fear of displacement, what other fears did he have?

The second -- and by far the more significant -- external concern of seamen in the 1870s arose from the natural hazards attaching to life on the high seas. These included disease, disasters, and assorted accidents. If we look at each of these briefly, it will be apparent that most fatalities increasingly came from accidents. Mutinies, by contrast, if not infrequent,

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were numerically minimal when compared with the other risk factors facing a sailor who chose his ship at random.

In the case of disease, the story of the discovery of the prophylactic properties of limejuice is a convenient example. It happened that during the blockade of Toulon in the summer of 1793, many of the ships' companies became afflicted with scurvy. It became such a threat that Lord Hood, then commander in chief in the Mediterranean, forbade ships carrying scurvy from entering port, and in effect prohibited them from obtaining even necessary supplies! His Lordship was provident enough, however, to allow one ship into port for the express purpose of obtaining lemons for the use of the fleet.

This incident was most fortuitous, for, in due course, due largely to the consumption of lemons, it became evident that the incidence of sickness in the Royal Navy fell from one-in-four to one-in-ten annually. This welcome discovery progressively relieved the clogged hospital bays on the ships themselves as well those in dry dock.

In time, the general supply of lemon-juice provided other valuable advantages to the navy, not least in the ability of ships' companies to continue at sea for longer periods than hitherto had been the case. The lemon subdued scurvy. And with the widespread and gradual improvement in general hygiene, coupled with the introduction of an ample supply of beef and vegetables (again by Lord Hood) -- particularly during their service in blockades -- other longterm advantages were to follow.

This did not mean that medical mishaps were brought under foreseeable control. Hardly! As late as 1895, for example, the *Trafalgar* traveled from Cardiff to New York and then to Batavia, where to avoid Java fever, the men were virtually imprisoned. Some sailors escaped and one was recaptured. Unfortunately, when he was taken on board, he infected the crew, and many of those on board the *Trafalgar* died of Java fever. Later still, in 1907 when the *Cape Horn* arrived at Falmouth, she docked with beriberi, killing one and hospitalising others. In short, the fear of contagion on the high seas was ever present. One need only recall the history of fever, plague, dysentery, small pox, typhus, cholera, malaria, and other diseases too numerous to mention, to realise the contribution made by modern medicine to the longevity of the average sailor.

But for our purposes it must be realised that disease was only one form of possible hazard -- and a minor one at that! Other hazards, by contrast, inclu-

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ded accident, collision, wreckage, ice, fire and fog, as well as countless others too numerous to mention.

As the following brief extract demonstrates, the mortality rate for sailors in the 1870s had multiple as well as devastating causes.

“1873, Jan. 22. -- British steamer Northfleet sunk in collision off Dungeness, 300 lives lost

1873, Nov. 23. -- White Star liner Atlantic wrecked off Nova Scotia, 547 lives lost.

1873, Nov. 23. -- French line Ville du Havre, from New York to Havre, in collision with ship Locharn and sunk in sixteen minutes, 110 lives lost.

1874, Dec. 24. -- Emigrant vessel Cospatrick took fire and sank off Auckland, 476 lives lost.

1875, May 7. -- Hamburg Mail steamer Schiller wrecked in fog on Scilly Islands, 200 lives lost.

1875, Nov. 4. -- American steamer Pacific in collision thirty miles southwest of Cape Flattery, 236 lives lost.

1878, March 24. -- British training ship Eurydice, a frigate, foundered near the Isle of Wight, 300 lives lost.”

The above extract, taken from the *Sinking of the Titanic and Great Sea Disasters* (edited by Logan Marshall - see also Website at <ftp://ftp.biblio.org>) acquaints us with the general sea-faring risk in the 1870s from random causes other than disease. Deaths from mutiny, which brings us to our third concern, were by contrast quite insignificant numerically.

Government Onboard

Perhaps what fascinates people about mutiny is not so much the numbers killed as the social and political relationships that bring it about. Mutiny is rebellion at close quarters. It is first and foremost about a captain and his crew, and how that relationship is formed and fractured. It is about understanding why a crew, against all the odds, including its own self-interest, should turn on its captain with venom and hatred. Unlike disease, the source of mutiny does not reside in a force outside human control, nor

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is it ever the result of accident. Quite obviously, it is the product of human will, and ought, therefore, to be amenable to reason.

In this sense the actions of the captain and crew of the *Caswell* should also be amenable to reason. And even if it is at the turn of the twenty first century that we reflect upon a matter that occurred in 1875/6 -- when full details and records are hard to come by -- we can, nevertheless, sketch some aspect of that mutiny, delineate its contours, and, where possible, fill up the canvas with some colouring. Towards this end it is necessary to say something of the government of the sailing ship, particularly through our historical image of both the sea captain and his crew.

Thus far we can see how the need for benevolent autocracy on board ship was universally appreciated and constantly justified. Disease and plague always called forth severe government -- one which all too often imposed conditions that would quarantine the crew for days and weeks. It is axiomatic to say that in times of plague the individual survives by virtue of group action. In the interests of survival all hands have to act as one. This also meant, of course, that --whether by way of excuse or genuine concern -- a ship could within seconds be turned into a floating prison, too often with a tyrant at the helm.

Sea-Captaincy

For centuries the ferocious character of the English sea captain was bound up with the fortunes of the fleet and the rise of the nation state. At first, in the age of discovery, the captain was seen as a patriotic explorer, (Columbus, Magellan, Drake and Raleigh), then as the defender of Faith and Fatherland (Granville, Frobisher, Gilbert, Howard of Effingham, and Nelson), then as a free-for-all buccaneer (captains Henry Morgan, and Henry Avery), as an adventurous pirate (captains Teach, Gow, and Kidd), and latterly as either an Officer in the Royal Navy, a Gentleman or as a simple laissez-faire entrepreneur in the Merchant Navy. Little need be said about the patriotic explorers; for whether we talk about Europe or the Argentine, the West Indies, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Mexico, North or South America -- there is hardly a country outside China in which we will not find a goodly supply of full-bodied admirals and conquistadores cluttering up every public square from Trafalgar to Trinidad. And O'Connell's Street in Dublin (before the demolition of Nelson's Pillar by the IRA) was no exception. To a great extent the sea captains carried autocratic cruelty across every gangplank, as if it were a perquisite of government upon the high seas. Whatever their personal profiles, they were held up in the public mind as patriots with personas as prominent as their statues.

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Until the publication of Alexander Exquemelin's *De Americaensche Zee-Rover* little or nothing was realized of the inner autocracy of a ship's government. The book appeared in Amsterdam in 1678 and in London in 1684. Only then did the reading public get a glimpse into the buccaneering persona. The sacking of Panama in 1671 by captain Henry Morgan helped to correct the patriotic pomp in which Drake and the Elizabethan explorers basked. Throughout the first quarter of the eighteenth century -- perhaps the high point of piracy on the high seas-- murder, rape, robbery, and pillage became synonymous with sailing. In his famous account of piracy, Charles Johnson (another *nom de plume* of Daniel Defoe?) selected his captains because of their crimes. Accordingly, in his '*General History of the Robberies and Murders of the most notorious Pyrates*' (London, 1724), there is hardly a sea-pirate, with the exception of Anne Bonny (the Cork lass tried in Jamaica in November, 1720), who did not die a most violent death; or whose head, like Blackbeard's, did not eventually decorate the end of a Bowsprit.

Yet it is through the medium of 'high literature' that these very violent sea captains are romanticised. In the person of the sea captain, violence manifests itself in defence mode, defending the faith, or, later on, the realm or, later on, in defence of personal honour. It only becomes social when Defoe's famous novel entitled, *The Life and Strange and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* was published in 1719.

Hitherto it was argued that *Crusoe* was based upon the experiences of Alexander Selkirk, who ran away to sea in 1704. Selkirk requested to be left on an uninhabited island in the Juan Fernandez Islands some hundreds of miles off the coast of Chile. He reputedly spent over four years there before being rescued by a crew of mutineers. This most Christian of anarchists then contrives to cultivate a servant (a native, 'Man Friday'), while being, at the same time, beset by cannibals -- the moral of *Crusoe* being to demonstrate that society and hierarchy are two social imperatives which imply a third, namely, the need for a captain -- preferably one with an English accent who sits at the governmental helm of things. This moral is further evident in *Crusoe*'s two sequels, *The Further Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *The Serious Reflections of Robinson Crusoe*, (1720). The violence and autocracy of the virtuous sea captain is unashamedly continued in *The Life, Adventures, and Pyracies* of the famous captain Singleton, (London 1720) and *The King of the Pirates, Being an Account of the Famous Enterprises of captain Avery* (1724). Both Singleton and Avery are depicted as exploitative egoists, violent if needs be, and rational rather than reasonable.

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A century later the English-speaking sea captain became suitably refined. Even when Herbert Melville's *Moby Dick* connected the New England Quakers with cannibalism, the quiet dignity of captain George Pollard was assured. In general, however, the focus began to shift from the rugged captain to the sea-faring experience itself. In the 1820s accounts like *The Red Rover* and *The Pilot, A Tale of the Sea*, by James Fenimore Cooper (Two Vols. New York, published by Charles Wiley, 1823) brought home the excitement of exploits in the Americas. Again patriotism featured significantly, and the psychotic sea-captain was being refined considerably.

The Common Sailor

From concern with the denizens of the quarterdeck to concern for those of the forecastle, is a long way to travel; for quarterdeck and forecastle may be only yards away on a ship, they are also as distant and as dismal as class relations are on land, the difference being, that on board ship one end of the town cannot at any time turn its back on the other. And to introduce these onboard tensions to the world, it soon became apparent that the common sailor -- not at all unlike the common twentieth century 'cowboy' under Hollywood management -- had to be sterilised before his pedestrian concerns could be brought to bear on public consciousness.

At first he was Christianised (even Quakerised) by Thomas Lurting (*The Fighting Sailor Turn'd Peaceable Christian*: HTML at voicenet.com; London, 1711). And only two centuries later could he be introduced to the fair sex, when he was romanticised in a sentimental way by Margaret Marshall Saunders (*Her Sailor: A Love Story*: Boston, L.C. Page, 1900). Later still, as sail had lost its savagery, the sailor became sanctified by age both by S. T. Coleridge's 'Ancient Mariner' and F. C. Woodworth's '*Stories by Jack Mason, the Old Sailor*', (NY. 1851). Woodworth, under the pseudonym, 'Theodore Thinker,' wrote a series of 'old-man-of-the-sea' stories laced with blueberry-pie morality, recalling the adventures of whaling and travel. These stories were aimed at a younger generation with a growing interest in sea-faring adventures.

With the exception of the *Mutiny on the Bounty*, very few serious works touched upon the internal dynamism of government on the high seas, and when they did, they pointed up the exact same moral dilemma. There have been several movies made of *Mutiny on the Bounty*, not least because it harvested a crop of concerns that is common to all of us, even in our everyday lives. It is this gripping moral dilemma in which we recognise ourselves

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immediately. And through it we identify with the subject matter of the mutiny, which resonates throughout all cultures. In Act 111, Scene 1, Hamlet shouts it from world end to English-speaking world end:

“To be or not to be, that is the question:
Whether it is nobler in the mind to suffer
the slings and arrows outrageous fortune
or to take arms against a sea of troubles and
by opposing end them?”

This is the question that Fletcher Christian poses when he can take no more of Captain Bligh's cruelty. Everywhere in the river of life we are all called upon to try and stop the flood, 'to take arms against a sea of troubles' and somehow end them. How we respond to violence is at the centre of our identity' it is what rivets us to Hamlet as well as to the *Mutiny on the Bounty*.

It is also the question which, in even graver terms , confronts Martin Luther, the religious reformer. And he answers: ‘Hier stehe Ich; Ich kann nichts anders.’ ‘Here I stand; I can do no other.’ And on a less elevated plane it also constitutes the *Riddle of the Caswell Mutiny*.

It is by virtue of these concerns that Richard Henry Dana, Jr's account of his experiences in the early nineteenth century have become so important. In his *Two Years Before the Mast* (The Harvard Classics, 1909-14), this young Harvard student reminded his readers of the less savoury side of a seaman's life. When he shipped out of Boston in August 1834 on the brig *Pilgrim*, he witnessed many things, but none had left such an indelible impression on him as the unnecessary flogging of two colleagues -- Sam, and John the Swede. Not unlike what happened on the *Bounty*, Dana demonstrates how a ship could be transported within minutes into the most violent abode. What is of particular importance to us, and to our understanding of the *Caswell* mutiny, is the group dynamic, or the effective chain of reactions to the captain's abuse of power. Because of this single issue we have dwelt at length -- and, hopefully, profitably -- on Dana's extraordinary narrative.

The nameless captain had apparently been picking on people for a few days. He had already threatened the cook with a flogging for dropping some wood on the deck. Now he was reproaching Sam, who was 'a good sailor,' even if he was a little 'slow.' John the Swede and others were standing by the main hatchway when they heard the captain's voice

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' raised in violent dispute' down in the hold: -

"You see your condition! You see your condition! Will you ever give me any more of your jaw?" No answer; and then came wrestling and heaving, as though the man was trying to turn him.

"You may as well keep still, for I have got you," said the captain.

Then came the question, "Will you ever give me any more of your jaw?"

"I never gave you any, sir," said Sam; for it was his voice that we heard, though low and half choked.

"That's not what I ask you. Will you ever be impudent to me again?"

"I never have been, sir," said Sam.

"Answer my question, or I'll make a spread eagle of you! I'll flog you, by G-d."

"I'm no negro slave," said Sam.

"Then I'll make you one," said the captain; and he came to the hatchway, and sprang on deck, threw off his coat, and rolling up his sleeves, called out to the mates -- "Seize that man up, Mr. A__, Seize him up! Make a spread eagle of him. I'll teach you all who is master aboard."

With this the crew and officers followed the captain up the hatchway, and after repeated orders the mate laid hold of Sam, who made no resistance. They then carried him to the gangway. It was at this stage that another crewmember responded.

"What are you going to flog that man for, Sir?" said John the Swede, to the captain."

Upon hearing this, the captain turned on him and ordered that he be put in irons. John the Swede went peaceably aft to the quarterdeck, while the captain attended to Sam. The captain was going to whip Sam personally while the crew 'grouped together in the waist', and Dana began to feel sick and angry at the sight of a man being 'fastened up and flogged like a beast.' Having lived with Sam for months, Dana said that he regarded Sam as 'his brother.' Describing his mixed reactions, he reflected:

"The first and almost uncontrollable impulse was resistance. But what was to be done? The time for it had gone by. The two best men were fast, and there were only two beside myself, and a small boy of ten or twelve years of age. And then there were (beside the captain) three officers, steward, agent and clerk. But beside the numbers, what is there for sailors to do? If they resist, it is mutiny; and if they succeed, and take the vessel, it is piracy. If they ever yield again, their punishment must come; and if they do not yield, they are pirates for life. If a sailor resists his commander, he resists the law, and piracy or submission are his only alternatives. Bad as it was, it must be borne. It is what a sailor ships for."

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This last sentence is striking in its ambiguity. When one thinks about it , it is very difficult to understand what Dana means. He is hardly saying that sailors should stoically accept even inhuman conditions or breaches of their human and constitutional rights with impunity! Or is this what he actually expects from sailors? How much is endurable short of self-defence?

Further on in the episode Dana writes:

“Swinging the rope over his head, and bending his body so as to give it full force, the captain brought it down upon the poor fellow’s back. Once, twice six times. “Will you ever give me any more of your jaw?” The man writhed with pain, but said not a word. Three times more. This was too much, and he muttered something, which I could not hear; this brought as many more as the man could stand; when the captain ordered him to be cut down, and to go forward”.

With this the captain now turned his attention to John the Swede. According to Dana, he stood on the quarterdeck, bareheaded, his eyes flashing with rage, and his face as red as blood. He was swinging a rope and calling out to his officers, “Drag him aft! Lay hold of him. I’ll sweeten him, etc., etc”. Having conceded to a peaceful flogging at first, the Swede then began to resist, but was subdued by the officers. And when he was made fast, he turned to the captain, who stood turning up his sleeves and getting ready for the blow, and asked:

“Have I ever refused my duty, sir? Have you ever known me to hang back, or to be insolent, or not to know my work?”

“No”, said the captain, “it is not *that* I flog you for; I flog you for your interference, for asking questions”.

“Can’t a man ask a question here without being flogged?”

“No”, shouted the captain; “nobody shall open his mouth aboard this vessel, but myself”, and began laying the blows upon his back, swinging half round between each blow, to give it full effect. As he went on, his passion increased, and he danced about the deck, calling out as he swung the rope: -- “If you want to know what I flog you for, I’ll tell you. It’s because I like to do it! – Because I like to do it. It suits me. That’s what I do it for”.

The man writhed under the pain, until he could endure it no longer, when he called out, with an exclamation more common among foreigners than with us-“Oh, Jesus Christ! Oh, Jesus Christ!”

“Don’t call on Jesus Christ,” shouted the captain; “he can’t help you. Call on Captain T__. He’s the man! He can help you! Jesus Christ can’t help you now!”

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At this juncture Dana tells us that he could look no longer. His blood ran cold and he turned away in disgust and horror. He revisited the scene with thoughts of revenge, but, again, ‘the falling blows and the cries of the man’ called him back to reality. At length the Swede was cut down. Every one else stood still at his post, while the captain, ‘swelling with rage and with the importance of his achievement’ strutted the quarter-deck, calling out to the crew:

“You see your condition! You see where I’ve got you all, and you know what to expect! You’ve been mistaken in me -- you didn’t know what I was! Now you know what I am!”

“I’ll make you toe the mark, every soul of you, or I’ll flog you all, fore and aft, from the boy, up”

“You’ve got a driver over you Yes, a slave driver -- a negro-driver! I’ll see who’ll tell me he isn’t a Negro slave!”

Shortly after this John the Swede’s back was swollen and covered with stripes in every direction. He asked the steward to ask the captain to let him have some salve, or balsam, to put upon it. “No,” said the captain, who heard him from below; “tell him to put his shirt on; that’s the best thing for him; and pull me ashore in the boat. Nobody is going to lay-up on board this vessel.”

Dana also recalls his fear that John the Swede, whom he regarded as a violent man and who was armed with a knife, might mutiny. In fact he didn’t. Dana also noted that the captain was probably armed. He also pointed out that the option of resisting for either Sam or John (and Dana?) meant that they ‘would have had nothing before them but flight and starvation in the woods of California, or capture by the soldiers and Indian bloodhounds, whom the offer of twenty dollars would have set upon them.’

The sleepless nights of the men groaning in pain settled a gloom over everyone, and made Dana reflect:

“I thought of our situation, living under a tyranny; of the character of the country we were in; of the length of the voyage, and of the uncertainty attending our return to America; and then, if we should return, of the prospect of obtaining justice and satisfaction for these poor men; and vowed that if God should ever give me the means, I would do something to redress the grievances and relieve the sufferings of that poor class of beings, of whom I then was one.”

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There are many lessons to be learned from Dana's account - which is why we have dwelt upon it so long.

First of all, we can see that what began with the captain's distemper and his threat to the cook was soon followed up by his bullying of Sam. This in turn led to Sam's public flogging. This public humiliation affected the crew, particularly John the Swede, who could not suppress his sense of injustice, so he fled to the side of the oppressed. Before long the whole crew was upset, but none of the others, including Dana, said anything. The captain continued his abuse, revealing even further depths of cruelty and an utter contempt for those in his charge. In such circumstances considerations of mutiny are no more than thoughts of self-preservation. Dana and the crew of the *Pilgrim* were now caste in the mould of Hamlet and Fletcher Christian, to rebel or to be bear witness to enormous injustice?

The second lesson we learn is somewhat more difficult to come to terms with, and when we compare Fletcher Christian with Richard Dana Jr., both of whom are faced with Hamlet's dilemma, then we can appreciate how difficult the problem is.

Not all men live with the discipline (or the future prospects) of Richard Dana. Some men are present-dwellers; they are less apt to defer gratification, whether that gratification comes from the assurance of future vengeance or from a sense of delayed justice. Moreover, such men have a morality of action, rather than one of reaction or introspection; they demand redress now, concurrent with the offence, rather than hereafter in retrospection, whether that retrospection is recounted in a court of law or in a novel. Richard Dana vowed to redress 'the sufferings of that poor class of beings', of which he was temporarily one. He did not vow to redress the injustice he saw done to Sam or John the Swede. Moreover, the redress he envisaged would follow only 'if God' should ever give him the means to do so. Some men of action (Christian Fletcher and Hamlet, for example) might argue that he had the means to redress the injustice before his eyes, and that he did not need God to provide the wherewithal for that redress.

The problem with Dana's account is the problem with Dana's morality. His relation with the captain (and the cruelties he was inflicting) was no more constrained than Christian's was to Captain Bligh or, for that matter, Hamlet's relation to his Father-in-law, the King of Denmark. Unlike Hamlet and Fletcher Christian, however, both of whom felt constrained to

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act, Dana, on due consideration, decided not to. He admitted that he felt compelled to act but decided not to do so -- hence that problematic phrase "Bad as it was, it must be borne. It is what a sailor ships for."

Men of action invariably wish to redress wrong spontaneously, wherever they find it. It may be quixotic, but not everyone is endowed with the fortitude and restraint, which Richard Dana exhibited. In point of fact Dana went on to practice law and politics. And during the operation of the Fugitive Slave Law, he acted as counsel on behalf of the fugitives Shadrach, Sims, and Burns. Abraham Lincoln appointed him United States District Attorney for Massachusetts. But this is still beside the point. The question is and was: Should Richard Dana have spoken up like John the Swede, and taken the lash? Or, alternatively, should the crew have revolted and at least restrained the captain? Maybe there are some occasions when, under severe provocation, mutiny *is* the moral thing to do.

It is desirable that we analyse Dana's narrative a little further.

There is obviously a great difference between what one feels when injustice is done to oneself, and what one feels when it happens to others in our presence. When we are personally confronted with unkindness or cruelty, we have a choice. We can resist it or bear it. It is peculiarly within our individual power to make such a decision. If we choose to bear it, it is because forbearance is very much a part of our character, of our individual psyche, of our peace-loving stoical personality. Proverbs and truisms applaud and encourage such forbearance as a virtue. Hence we hear that 'Great minds suffer in silence.' We are content with our own unique sense of restraint and fortitude. We choose to bear 'the whips and scorns of outrageous fortune' rather than 'take arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing end them.' If we are Christian, we say we 'turn the other cheek.' We 'grin and bear it.' This we do personally, and for ourselves. We could, of course, take action -- or at least we say and believe that 'we could take action', thereby emphasizing the fact that we have made a virtuous and stoical decision to bear up to the adversity in question. If we did actually take action, it would assuredly be by way of some kind of alternative outcome -- alternative, that is, to our agreeable self-esteem and, possibly, to our life style as well. In this way we can see that we are authors of our own tolerance or martyrdom.

But when strangers are confronted with unkindness or cruelty in our presence, something else happens: we are pitted in a different mould. We

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are summoned to witness evil, to look on, to be excluded from the action. It is others who are suffering while we remain silent. We can neither adopt the pain stoically nor ameliorate it in the person of others. We are forced to witness cruelty, and the harsh truth is that we cannot bear to watch others suffer unnecessary pain, even the pain that we would stoically endure ourselves. Hamlet is activated out of a love for justice and for the memory of his murdered father, Luther does it for truth, integrity and the state of Catholicism under a corrupt Papacy. But Christian Fletcher and John the Swede are no less high-minded; they sacrifice themselves for others.

What inflames us most, perhaps, is the wanton cruelty to helpless others. Our most intimate sense of justice is ravaged. All our most sanctified senses of civilized living come forward and demand redress. It is the march of the righteous and, because it cannot be borne by us personally , it compels us to action. By the same token, those who in our presence, inflict gratuitous pain and suffering, especially on innocent or inadequate people -- people who have not got our privileges, our restraint, our education, our fortitude, our affection - they soon become the object of our most forceful and violent feelings. What first gave us character is now in utter revolt and cannot be subdued or, alternatively, can only be subdued with enormous difficulty. Even when we see animals badly treated, we rebel with a violence that is disproportionate to our ordinary character. Our revolt is intended to edify the wrongdoer, but only after peace is secured.

That is why ‘teaching someone a lesson’ has far too often become associated more with violence and vengeance than with education. That is also why in some circumstances spontaneous violence is the only lesson in morality possible. I do not mean premeditated violence or war carried out in retrospect or, indeed, war that is not defensive in nature, but action that is designed to ‘teach the enemy a lesson.’

At a personal level, the problem with humans is not so much that they are diabolical, but rather, like John the Swede, they are angelic:magnificently angelic. Sam submitted to a flogging by a cruel captain, John the Swede voiced his objections and took the whip, and Dana lived to tell the tale. Had someone taken action, we would have had a capital trial for mutiny. Wherein lies morality then? In the captain? In Sam’s submission to unjust and brutal discipline? In John the Swede’s quixotic if magnanimous gesture? Or in Dana’s narrative? And if they had resisted, what court could capture the moment in which they all ineluctably and ineffectually took part? For many people spontaneity has its own morality, it