

# "They're 75 Per Cent Hokum"

## Parkin Christian on Stories About Pitcairn Island

**P**ARKIN CHRISTIAN, great-great-grandson of Fletcher Christian, leader of the mutiny on the *Bounty*, thinks that films and books about Pitcairn Island (and most newspaper interviews, too, for that matter) are 75 per cent. hokum. According to Mr. Christian, there's more undiluted nonsense circulated about the little community of Pitcairn than about any other place on the globe.

Take the story flashed round the world six months ago that Pitcairners were in serious danger of starving. There wasn't a scrap of truth in it. Pitcairn grows every food its inhabitants need, with the exception of flour, and that is supplied regularly by passing ships. All sorts of fruit—oranges, limes, bananas, pineapple, as well as every conceivable vegetable, flourish in the warm, rainy climate. As long as a Pitcairner works, he'll never starve, and that's where the rumour of starvation was likely to do most harm. It could only mean that the Pitcairners were becoming lazy and degenerate.

In spite of inter-marriage, in spite of a sub-tropical climate and a soil in which every seed germinates, the 190-odd Pitcairners have certainly not become degenerate. Long years of isolation on one of the loneliest islands in the Pacific have given them self-reliance; hard work and rough, strenuous sports have given them a magnificent physique.

Most liners, bound to and from England, via Panama, stop an hour or two at Pitcairn. The whaleboats are out two

was in a ward of the Wellington Public Hospital that he was interviewed. Pitcairners are seldom ill, and it was obvious that Mr. Christian wasn't enjoying himself. You couldn't help thinking that he himself was the best answer to stories of poverty on Pitcairn. He stands six feet two, must weigh all of 15 stone, and he has the healthy skin of a man who has lived his life in the open.

He has been to New Zealand several times, his last visit on account of toothache. Pitcairners seldom have dental trouble, but Mr. Christian had it, and badly. After months of pain he came to Wellington, took a temporary job, and went to a dentist. "I told him to take the things out and throw them away."

But a dentist would have a poor practice on Pitcairn. The islanders usually live to 70 years and over with every tooth intact.

There is a nurse on the island, and several of the women are qualified midwives, so even though there is no doctor child-bearing has few terrors for the Pitcairn woman. In the many years since records have been kept there have been only three deaths in childbirth.

### Boat Building and Racing

Boatbuilding is a craft which the islanders are careful to perpetuate, as they depend on their home-made boats for fishing, for sport, and for making contact with passing liners. The fishing boats are small and roughly hewn from a couple of trees, but the whaleboats are cunningly and beautifully made.

Boat racing is a favourite sport, and the Pitcairners would be a good match for a crack crew anywhere in the world. A highly trained Australian crew had to admit, a couple of years ago, that the Pitcairners had too much stamina for them.

The boats are handled and raced in seas in which it would seem they could never live, and it is terrible weather indeed in which a liner must pass by unhailed. There have been mishaps, of course. Not so long ago a couple of boats



PORTRAIT OF A PITCAIRNER: Parkin Christian was lying in a bed in the Wellington Public Hospital when this picture was taken

## Famous Families of Pitcairn

Parkin Christian belongs to the fifth generation since the mutinous Fletcher Christian, and apparently there is no danger of the name dying out. Two years ago Mr. Christian became a grandfather, and there are other lads of the seventh generation on Pitcairn.

Most of the families on the island whose forefathers were originally on His Majesty's ship *Bounty*, bear the names Christian, Young, or McCoy. There are no Adames remaining.

In the past 50 years or so, many members of Pitcairn families have made their homes in New Zealand. Living in Auckland are several Quintals, and in Wellington, Parkin Christian has a cousin, and a son, aged 25, who was educated in New Zealand

or three miles from shore, waiting. If it's blowing half a gale, with a swell as high as a house, they'll still be there, managing their boats with incredible skill, swarming up the side of the ship to do their trade in fruit and curios, shouting farewells as they pull back to the island.

### They are Seldom Ill

Parkin Christian has come to New Zealand for a surgical operation, and it

were blown 200 miles from Pitcairn to Henderson Island. Thanks to expert seamanship they were back in ten days with no one any the worse.

### Those Loin Cloths!

Mr. Christian knew all about the film "Mutiny on the Bounty." He had read

the book and had met and talked with Nordhoff, co-author, who had stayed a fortnight at Pitcairn gathering colour.

What did Pitcairners think about the picture?

"Those loincloths!" A shrug of contempt.

Did the mutineers literally burn their boats behind them when they first came to Pitcairn?

Another shrug.

In fact, it is clear that Pitcairn islanders generally, and Mr. Christian in particular, haven't a high opinion of the attempts which have been made to romanticise them.

## Two Shillings' Worth of Music

His 46th and final year as conductor of the promenade concerts of the London Symphony was begun by Sir Henry Wood a few weeks ago to the accompaniment of the crash of bombs and the wail of air raid sirens. A "prom" concert extended into an all-night show as German bombers ranged overhead.

After the regular programme (which was devoted to the works of Richard Wagner) Sir Henry led the audience in community singing; then members of the orchestra did solos until they ran out of numbers; finally musicians from the audience took over the stage.

The 3000 who straggled home just before dawn were satisfied that two shillings had never bought so much good music.

Australian musicians are not paid highly enough, according to Georg Schneevoigt, famous Finnish conductor. "After years of hard work many earn only £6 or £7 a week, which is not much more than the typists' £4 or £5," he said recently.

He advocates Sunday afternoon concerts at which all sections of the community could hear good music at low prices. "They would greatly help Australian musical progress, and should be arranged by the broadcasting people, with the help of Government bodies. At such concerts in Finland you can hear the 'Ninth Symphony' for a shilling."