

Mutiny

A Tale of Henry Hudson and
the Discovery

JOHANN W. OLDCASTLE

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*Dedicated to Alexander Wakeley for it was
his idea in the first place*

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Henry Hudson and John Hudson in the Arctic

CHAPTER ONE

Henry Hudson

He was looking - or so everyone said - for the North-West Passage. What that means, or why anyone would want to look for it – that is another matter entirely with room enough for speculation in itself. But if he was looking for it – and mark me, *if* – the tale which I am about to relate would never – yes, you heard me, *never* – have come to pass at all. This is a shocking revelation, but as his son John Hudson, and his close companion during his later years, I feel fully qualified to say it. Let them speculate and let them take it to Courts of Law; but it will remain, impregnably, unerringly and stubbornly, a Mystery. In fact, so would all the things that happened in this strange tale if so treated without an eyewitness account. But here I am giving you an Eyewitness Account, and we need nothing more. He was young to look at, at the beginning of the voyage, with his kind eyes

and clean face with an upturned moustache and small beard, fiery red in colour suggesting a connection with King Henry VIII or more distantly perhaps, Sea-King Rollo the Red-Beard of the Vikings. Perhaps, that is why he had an insatiable desire to go North – and especially North-West. But he was also a cunning man, and had an ear with some of the most intriguing, deceptive and secretive merchants of the Kingdom of England. And now he stood, Henry Hudson, friend of Prince Henry of Wales himself, at the dock of St. Katherine's Pool below the Tower of London. Behind him the masts of Thomas Weymouth's well-known ship, the *Discovery*, rose up to the sky. It was the 16th of April 1610, and a rather grey day. The crew bustled to and fro preparing for the voyage that was to begin at the dawning of the 17th. Hudson was overseeing the loading of the last-minute supplies. Robert Juet, the second mate of the ship's company was by his side. He had a small, twisted, cynical smile that burst forth whenever something bad

happened, and one could almost see the cogs of his evil genius grinding incessantly within the recesses of his cavernous mind.

‘Probably take a long time to get to Bantam [Java], what with searching for the North-West Passage’, he laughed sceptically.

‘I reckon we will be there by Candlemas next year’, Hudson contradicted, ‘I have many old Norwegian charts which show the passage clearly. There can be nothing as easy’.

Just nodded slyly. ‘So be it’, he said, storing the remark up in his evil brain for future regurgitation when convenient to him. The voyage had been put together with help from several prominent merchants. Sir Thomas Smythe of the East India Company, Sir Dudley Digges who was a rich landowner, and John Wolstenholme, collector of customs at the Port of London. Prince Henry of Wales had also backed the expedition in his down-to-earth manner and had given Hudson a private audience at St. James’ Palace.

I myself was busy in the capacity of a ship's boy, along with Nicholas Syms, from Wapping-Old-Stairs, and together we were in the process of securing cargo under the supervision of Adrian Motter, the boatswain (or bo'sun)'s mate. The clang and roar of voices along with the shout of porters, deck-hands and crew made St. Katherine's dock a noisy place. As evening drew on, several prominent figures from London including the Expedition's main backers came to bid the master a personal farewell, before the Grand Send-Off the next morning. Darkness enclosed London and the huge bulk of the Tower of London on Tower Hill remained a dark silhouette against a navy-blue sky. Syms and I, at length our work over, took a moment to look out over London for the second-to-last time. Candle-light glittered from the houses and warehouses that lined the Thames and cast little spots of bright light that glittered on the waters.

‘I look forward to seeing the East Indies’, Syms said, ‘But not so much to the Arctic part of our travels.’

‘I would like to see Bantam, too’, I said, ‘But the Arctic is very interesting. I have been there twice before now on my father’s expeditions.’

‘I don’t know how you can say that’, Syms remarked, ‘Isn’t it cold and horribly dismal?’ ‘Not dismal’, I replied, ‘But it is very cold in the winter. On some days you can hardly breathe because of the cold.’

‘That doesn’t sound too lovely’, Syms laughed, ‘Give me the Tropics any day.’

‘Come on with ya’, called Motter, the bosun’s mate, ‘Come now all ye loiterers! To bed, the watch below!’

Syms, Wilson, (the 21-year-old surgeon), Pearse (a seaman) and Motter, along with me, all slept in the berths between the pumps and the capstan in the hold, in pairs. Wilson and I were to port. It was not long before, rocked by the swinging hammock, I fell asleep.

Next morning, we were up, exceedingly early, preparing to leave. All was ready within an hour, Prince Henry, Richard Haklylyt, Sir Thomas Smith, Sir Dudley Digges along with many others, had assembled on the dock to see the *Discovery* off. The Prince of Wales and Sir Thomas entered Hudson's cabin at the last minute to toast to the health of the Captain and his expedition. To a torrent of cheers, the *Discovery* got underway, making out into the shipping channel in the centre of the Thames. Haklylyt, however, was more resigned in his cheering, even as we could tell – but I never knew, nor will ever know the reason why. Perhaps he doubted the credibility of a Northwest passage. The *Discovery*, proudly flying her sails and flags, the Flag of the Kingdom of England from behind, the galleon made out for the borders of London and Gravesend. Sparks Henry



Hudson and Prince Henry on Board the
Discovery

immediately began to fly between Hudson and Colebourne, who was meant to act as Hudson's advisor, and when we met a Pinke off Gravesend, bound for London, Hudson ordered that a signal be made to exchange crew. The Pinke hauled to and an exchange was made. In place of Colebourne we got Henry Greene who was from Kent and was a well known gambler and had been involved in a couple of brawls.

Gravesend dropped abeam.

'Colebourne was much more worthy than the master, Hudson', Juet remarked with a sly wink to Greene, 'Mark me, I do believe he had the idea for the search of the Northwest Passage above 61 degrees, so I do.'

I reported this sedition to my father at once. 'Don't idle away with such tales, Jack my boy', Hudson said with his accustomed smile, such a rare jewel among sea captains, 'He means well and doubtless was friendly with Colebourne. I dropped him off as it is no good to have contention and division or threat to

power on an exploration vessel, or any other for that matter.'

I did not trust Juet at all, all the same. I was soon called by William Wilson the bosun. 'Come, come now Jack', he called, 'Time for you to clean the galley!'

Bennet Matthews, the cook, did not of course see fit to clean the galley himself. This he commissioned me or Nick Syms to do. I set to work scrubbing diligently at the brick and iron galley-oven with a will.

Before us lay the unknown; the Arctic, the North-West Passage, even the East Indies. And behind us lay civilisation and the turmoil of a land in political unrest.

A couple of days later, we passed the last point of English land and turned course due North for the Orkneys, under Scottish jurisdiction.

'I'll be glad to get past Iceland and actually set down to work', Wilson said, 'I imagine it will be much more exciting then.'

'If, of course, there is manslaughter at the end of it all!', said Juet with a sly wink.

CHAPTER TWO

Orkney

It was the 4th of May when Greene spotted the Orkney coast.

‘Good man’, Hudson praised him, ‘We will set in near Stromness and take on water for the ship.’

Water is the main necessity for life that is the most valuable and the most perishable. Ours had already started to go green and stale after a month in casks. But it was not salty, and that was the only thing that made it more potable than the very sea-water. Juet, as was his wont, found sarcastic things to say even about that. Really, I do not know why the master trusted him at all. He was the most foul and cynical man I ever met, surpassed only by Greene for a lascivious life. Greene had ‘worshipful’ parents, but fell far short of their example and spent all that he had on riotous living. Hudson, however, had compassion upon him and managed to

secure four pounds from his mother to buy clothes for the pitiful mannikin, but otherwise he had no wages, which was a good thing, for he long would have gambled it away. He once said that, 'as for religione, hee was a blank sheet on which hee could write what he would', and lived it out in profanity and vainglorious living. Once again, Hudson took him very much into his trust, so there must have been some good to be eked out of him.

The *Discovery* stood in for the deserted bay with a spring on the Isle of Hoy, on the 5th of May. We sprang for the rigging, Nick and I taking the mainmast topsail under our charge, whilst Hudson, in his resounding commanding, but benevolent, voice, shouted orders. The *Discovery* was taken in as close as we could to the bay and the last sail came furling in as the capstan was worked around from the hold and the majestic ship came to a rest.

I was sent with the shore party to collect water. Motter was there to keep order, and

Juet, too – probably to make chaos. The empty barrels were dragged up from the hold, making a hollow clumping as we struggled up the companionway (*or ladder*). Sundry barrels that were rather green and foul of colour were emptied and put into the scallop (*type of small boat*) and we rowed ashore, Juet at the tiller in the capacity of Mate. I took a for'ard oar so that Motter, placed immediately behind, could supervise my strokes.

‘Dig them deeper, Jack’, he urged, ‘There. That’s a better one – but not too deep’, he added after a moment.

The *Discovery* swung out behind us, the majestic hull outlined against the brilliant summer sea. The Orkney coast was anything but inviting. Rocks rose from the sea which rolled itself up like a tiger and dashed itself against them. Atop the rocky outcrops, short brownish grass grew, scarcely enough to keep any livestock alive. But a few hardy wild sheep grazed here and there, scattered over the rolling wastes atop the rocky walls. Here

and there, the land swept down to a sandy little beach where the sea was turquoise in colour and like nothing you could find on the grey eastern coast of England. A little rocky outcrop hid the stream which tumbled out of the rocks into the sea. Here we beached the scallop and set to work filling barrels.

‘Looks like – ha, ha – the tropics!’, laughed Juet sarcastically, ‘Ha, ha! We shall be there, oh ha ha, by Candlemas, oh ha ha ha!’

‘Beware thou speakest no sedition’, warned the bosun’s mate Motter.

‘If you were my Motter, ha ha!’ said Juet with a cynical laugh at his bad joke, ‘I’d have you hanged.’

Motter grunted and hauled out a barrel. ‘Yes, the old ones are always the best’, he retorted. I could tell he regretted Juet was the Mate, or he would have clubbed him down right on the spot, in the rightful capacity of Bosun. One by one the barrels were placed under the spouting water, filled and dragged back to the scallop. This was



"I came scrambling quickly out again" – At the Orkneys

hard enough work and it took three men to lift a full barrel. But Juet did not lift a finger to help. He stayed near, however, much to my annoyance, and kept cracking foul jokes. It was necessary when filling a barrel to steady it as it perched on a rock beneath the gushing spout of the stream. One could see why this had been a watering-place since Viking days. In looking about anxiously to check whether Juet was still looking, I slipped and fell with a wonderful splash into the shallow waters of the bay. The sailors hooted with ribald laughter. I came scrambling out again, dripping with water.

‘Come now, Jack, hold your ground better than that!’ Motter said jovially.

Juet hooted with sarcastic laughter. ‘Beat any stone for a splash! Ha ha!’

Motter gave him a grim look which chilled the cynical old man to the marrow. ‘Stow it you!’, cried Juet angrily, ‘Or I’ll skin you myself!’

The men continued hauling at the barrels.

‘All in, sir!’ I cried to Motter when we had finished.

‘Good man’, he said, ‘Now, in you get, Juet my good friend!’

Juet looked bewildered for a moment and almost obeyed. Then the colour rose to his cheeks and in a mighty passion he nearly clubbed Motter down, but thought better of it just in time. Smirking, Motter nodded slyly.

‘After you’, Juet said curtly and vented his wrath instead by giving me a club on the shoulder with his fist. In a few moments more, we were leaving the beach behind and swinging out over the bay’s choppy water towards the *Discovery*, which stood gallantly at anchor in the bay. The way back was harder than the way there, as the scallop was fully loaded and water is a very heavy kind of cargo. But all the oarsmen made light work of it and we arrived back alongside the *Discovery* in a few minutes in the heaving swell of the North Atlantic. A few lone gulls wheeled overhead, emitting a piercing

scream and the uncanny cry of Great Auks echoed from the land. Hudson met us as we came up the rope ladder, hauling the first barrel with the aid of a rope from a crewman on deck.

‘Well done’, he said, looking pleased, ‘We can set out immediately for the Farro (*Faroe*) Islands. Not, of course, that we will land there at all. They serve as a landmark for changing course for Iceland. My, Jack, you are wet.’

‘He fell in!’ laughed Abacuck Prickett, a seaman.

‘Now, I thought you were better on your feet than all of that, my boy!’ Hudson said, surprised, ‘Haven’t you got your sea-legs yet?’

‘It was on land at the spring’, I hastily explained, ‘It is easy to lose your balance on the wet rocks.’

‘Heart alive! It was some splash, though!’ Motter chuckled, ‘But not his fault at all.’

Hudson laughed a jovial laugh. ‘Go and get some new garments on, if you have a change,

once you've finished unloading.' 'Let the whelp perish of the cold', Juet said, 'And the inheritance would be ours!'

CHAPTER THREE

Lande of Ise

The sky was clear and a good, strong, healthy breeze was blowing in from the sea which we reached with on our course for the Farro Islands. As even drew on, we got our last sight of the British Isle, and the domains of King James. In a blaze of sunset, the North Coast of Sutherland in the Kingdom of Scotland was only just visible behind us, and was soon lost into the bright shining sea to the south.

‘Last sight of the Island until we see it from the South’, Abacuck Prickett mentioned casually to me.

The *Discovery* foamed on, with a slightly stayed and calmer wind than at mid-day as it always seems to be in the evening. Nick came up to me by the rail.

‘Time for the watch below to turn in’, he said. Half the crew formed the watch below for half the night and the other half for the rest

of the night. I went to ring the bell that sat on its belfry on the foc'sle. Its low chimes rang out over the sea.

Night fell. The *Discovery* ploughed on, making North-West incessantly and inherently, her great cream sails glowing in the darkness of the Atlantic Night, like a tiny island surrounded by mile upon mile of unending expanses of desertified ocean spreading north, south, east and west.

For several days the monotonous routine continues, alternately cloudy and sunny, rough and smooth. On the 8th of May we passed by the Farro Islands which stood out in ballast fjords and mountains, treeless but beautiful in a rugged way, with weird rock formations outlined against the sky. On the 11th, however, there came a change in the unending routine. Hudson sent Prickett up the mast and in a moment he was crying out that he could see land.

'Iceland', Hudson replied, 'If my calculations are all correct, we are now nearing the south-eastern end of the island.'