

Balancing the Budget with Stamps

By GEO. M. FOWLDS

IN A tax-ridden world it is of interest to hear of a place which lacks the alleged civilised advantages of taxes, tariffs, quotas and embargoes on trade, a national debt or a goal. Such a fortunate little land is the lonely island of Pitcairn in the eastern Pacific. Further, this small community of 110 souls, whose local funds prior to the war amounted to £50, mainly from the interest of stamp collectors overseas, has suddenly found itself with a credit of £40,000. While a few countries have assisted their finances by frequent changes in stamp designs, which many philatelists regard as a bit of a racket, this is probably the first occasion on which a community has been able to meet the whole costs of government and still have a very substantial credit in the bank. This will enable the islanders to have for the first time, a resident doctor and a full time schoolmaster, though it is interesting to record that Pitcairn claims to be the first place which adopted compulsory education.

For over a century Pitcairn Island has attracted world wide interest because of its association with the mutiny on the "Bounty" in 1789. After what was probably the most dramatic event in British maritime history, Fletcher Christian and his companions sailed away from the avenging arm of the English Admiralty to apparent oblivion. It was nineteen years after the mutiny, before the world was startled by the news of the discovery of their hideout by an American whaler. The inhabitants of Pitcairn Island today are the descendants of Fletcher Christian's party of eight Europeans and their Tahitian wives. The first decade of the settlement was accompanied by a train of treachery, drunkenness, debauchery and murder. So that at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century, of

the eight Europeans and eight Tahitian males, only John Adams remained alive. Along with Young, his last companion, they were the only mutineers to die peacefully in their beds. As the first teacher, preacher and law-giver, he was the means of turning the people of this sin-drenched isle to a better way of life so that eventually it became probably the most Christian-living community in the Pacific.

Because of his remarkable work, Adams was the only one of the mutineers, on whom the British Government could have, but did not lay its hands, to stand trial for his part in this, the most serious crime in the naval code. Carved on the stone over his grave are the poignant words, "In Hope," and this is stated to have been sent out by Queen Victoria. For the first hundred years, the islanders observed the Church of England form of worship, but following a visit in the 80's of the last century by a Seventh Day Adventist from the U. S. A., the people embraced this faith. One result of the change was that having to adopt a vegetarian diet, involved the killing of the island's stock of pigs, to be followed by a hectic week or two of roast pork. In order to protect this unique community from undesirable influences, no strangers are allowed to land on the island without the consent of the High Commissioner from the Western Pacific at Suva, Fiji, who obtains permission by radio from the magistrates.

Though the land is communally owned, the gardens are individually worked. When anyone commits a violation of the local ordinances, the punishment is usually a day's labour on the island road, but arrangements are made for offenders to work on the same day, when the whole population goes out and makes a picnic of it.