

The MUTINY and MASSACRE
on BOARD a CONVICT SHIP
The Morning Chronicle (London, England),
Tuesday, April 25, 1848; Issue 24495

*The MUTINY and MASSACRE on BOARD
a CONVICT SHIP.*

The following is the account of this horrible transaction, given by Lieut. Seymour, of the Bombay cavalry, who with his lady was a passenger on board the unfortunate General Wood, some particulars relating to which we mentioned yesterday. The convicts on board were all Chinese, from Hong Kong, with the exception of one Portuguese, who, it appears, acted very well:—

"At about half-past one or two in the morning on the 3d of January," says Lieut. Seymour, "we were awakened by a loud noise on deck, and the smashing of glass inside the cuddy. I immediately rose and went to the door of our cabin, for the purpose of ascertaining the reason of the uproar. I had scarcely touched the handle, when the door which separates the captain's cabin from ours was thrown suddenly open, and Capt. Stokoe rushed in, exclaiming, 'For God's sake shut the door, and keep it fast.' He was almost immediately followed by Mr. Andrew Farquhar, one of the passengers. Having secured the entrances, I turned and asked the captain to tell me what was the matter, but could get no reply from him. He (the captain) appeared to have lost all his presence of mind, and kept running up and down, exclaiming at different intervals, 'O, merciful Father, what have I done that this should happen?' 'O, blessed Jesus, save us,' &c. All this time he had his pistol case in his hands. After repeating the question over and over again as to what had occurred, he informed me that the convicts had risen and had taken possession of the vessel and cuddy, where the arms had been placed. I then asked him as to whether anything could be done, and what had become of the mates and crew. His reply was, 'The convicts have got the fire-arms, nothing can now be effected.' He was ignorant of the fate of his officers, and the lascars must have all hid themselves. After this Captain Stokoe became calmer, and commenced loading his pistols. Just as this was done we heard the cries of Mr. Gill, the third officer, followed by heavy blows. The moans became fainter and fainter. Captain Stokoe went outside the cabin door, and fired his pistols without any effect. He then rushed back again, dragging Mr. Gill, whom he threw upon the mattress, which happened to be on the floor. Mr. Gill had a sheet thrown around him, and was one mass of blood from head to foot; he lay there groaning, and on our asking him where he was wounded, he said he did not know; but from the excruciating pain he was suffering in his thigh, thought it must be broken. He must have been dreadfully mutilated, as not a white spot could be seen on his body from the large quantity of blood. Captain Stokoe was perfectly incapacitated from doing anything, and remained without acting at all. I put the question to him as to whether there was any way of getting down into the hold, where we might hide Mrs. Seymour and her ayah; he said at first no, but afterwards commenced tearing up the planks which covered the locker; but to our disappointment the aperture by the rudder down to the hold was too small for even Mrs. Seymour to attempt. We then requested Captain Stokoe to speak to the Chinese, and offer them the boat if they would spare our lives. His answer was, 'Those wretches know no mercy.' He said he would try to speak to the convicts, and went out of the quarter-gallery port for that purpose, after which we neither saw nor heard anything more of him. When Capt. Stokoe had left us I put out all the lights in our cabin for fear of the convicts seeing what we were about. During the time I held the door it was twice tried to be opened by the convicts, but, on finding it secured, they retired. I then directed Mrs. Seymour and the ayah to hide themselves in the quarter galley as the last resource. I could see through the chinks of the door what was going on in the cuddy. The convicts seemed busy knocking off their irons and rifling the mate's cabin. After some time a body of them, armed with the ship's axes, spears, &c., commenced breaking in the cabin doors, and, seeing it was then useless for me alone to stand by the door any longer, I retired to the quarter-gallery, where the rest were, exclaiming 'the convicts are breaking open the doors.' Mr. Andrew Farquhar then left us, and we saw no more of him until the morning. We then heard them breaking open our cabin door. There was a scuffle. Mr. Gill, who had been lying on the cabin floor, immediately rushed into the quarter-gallery, bringing with him a bayonet (the only available weapon that we had during the whole period), and closed the door after him, desiring me to assist him in securing the same. The convicts, after trying two or three times to force it, without success, withdrew. We now knew our only hope of

safety lay in our remaining quiet where we were until daylight, which we thought must then be near at hand. At the time we imagined the convicts would either take to the boats and leave the ship, or some vessel might come down to render us assistance. We sat in dreadful suspense for about an hour or more, and our feelings may be well imagined when we heard over our heads the sound of a person being dragged forward, followed by blows, evidently inflicted by a heavy sharp instrument upon some soft substance, and then a dull splash in the water—this was repeated five times. After a lapse of a minute or two, we heard the clashing of the men's leg-irons as they again came to our door; on finding it secure, they burst in one of the panels, and thrust their spears and swords through; upon which Mr. Gill called out, 'I say, Foki, why for you want to kill me?' which was answered by 'Come out, come out,' and a repetition of the thrusting of the spears and swords. Mr. Gill took the bayonet to offer resistance, but in the attempt got dreadfully cut and wounded about the hand, the Chinese taking good care not to come within the reach of any weapon that we might have, but to keep at spear's length; they then broke the rest of the door to splinters. Mr. Gill, being in the way of their weapons, and was unable to stand the agony from the wounds he was receiving, got out of the quarter-gallery window, after which he was no more seen. I had taken up my sword, but found, owing to its length, and the confined place we were in, that I was unable to use it, especially, as I said before, on account of the convicts being out of the reach of any weapon. As yet, we hoped we might escape, for they were ignorant of our being on board, having broken open the door, and seeing the port open, and it also being dark, we remained unperceived, and the Chinese retired; it was, however, for a few paces only, for one of them returned bearing a lantern in his hand, from the reflection of which we were discovered. I was immediately dragged out and surrounded by a number of the convicts armed with every description of arms that they had been able to lay hold of; they then forced me forward to the weather gangway, where they made signs I was to go overboard, and, to facilitate my egress, commenced to cut me down. I fell over some spars, and received two cutlass wounds, and in attempting to evade others, fell backwards with my head foremost into the sea. Not being able to swim, I laid hold of a rope that was over the ship's side; whilst in that position two men were thrown overboard close to me—one a corpse, but the other, not being hurt, got into the main chains, whence he would not render me any assistance, although I entreated him to do so. Not being able to hold any longer, and feeling almost sure that all had been murdered on board, I gave myself up as lost, and let go my hold. By chance I floated to the after part of the ship, where the ship's gig was suspended with one end in the water (Captain Stokoe having attempted to cut it away during the night), and remained there concealed until daylight, when I was called up by the convicts, who assured me I should not be hurt if I came on board. I did so with difficulty, being very much bruised from the heavy swell that kept continually striking the boat against the ship's stern. I there met Mr. Farquhar and Mrs. Seymour, who had suffered no hurt, but had been dreadfully frightened by the Chinese, who had repeatedly menaced her life. They frequently said that had she been the wife of Mr. Caldwell, the deputy superintendent of police at Hong-Kong, they would have chopped her into pieces. When on deck I perceived a brig at anchor close to the leeward of us. The Chinese, on finding we could not navigate the ship for them, confined us to our cabin, and being shown by the Chinese sailors on board, they slipped the cable and stood to the south-east, striving to avoid Singapore Harbour. After we were under weigh I observed the ship's gig floating towards the land, and the brig noticed before standing after us with all sail set, when she suddenly changed her course and steered for Singapore. The same evening we saw a ship standing towards us; the convicts then put the crew under hatches and handcuffed them. The ship passed on without noticing us. At night the gunner's mate attempted to run the ship ashore; but the Chinese being too vigilant, he could not succeed. Mrs. Seymour's ayah, from the effects of the first night's fright, became deranged on the third day, and, notwithstanding our endeavours to prevent her, jumped overboard and was drowned. After tacking off and on at the pleasure of the Chinese day after day, on Friday, Jan. 20, we sighted the Great Natunas."

Another eye-witness, referring to the body of poor Gill, remarks:—

"I saw a quantity of blood about the starboard gangway. Some one was lying on the starboard side of the poop, as if he was asleep. A blanket was thrown on him, on which was a quantity of blood, and some on the deck and hencoops. I saw the person under the blanket move several times. There were four or five Chinese keeping watch over him with cutlasses. . . . Saw neither captain nor officers. The Chinese tindal and carpenter were standing on the poop, giving directions how the ship should be steered. . . . On the 20th day the ship struck on a reef of coral; the ship had all sail set. Got out the boats. In the first cutter were about forty-five Chinese. The passengers were on the poop. It was told the Chinese if they killed any one the Malays would not spare them, as the country was under the rule of a Malay Rajah. The convicts wanted to kill the lady passenger, but after it was explained to them that the Malays would look upon them as pirates, and treat them as such if they did so, they desisted. . . . One of the Chinese convicts hanged himself to a tree during the night, after which two of the crew kept watch over them with swords provided by the Dattoo Kya."—*Straits Times*, Feb. 24.