

pearl-handled pistol off the God-forsaken coast of Tierra del Fuego after scrawling in the ship's log the message "the soul of man dies in him."

"FitzRoy was given command of the ship for its return voyage," Henslow had related. "He did a good job of it by all accounts, especially considering that the crew refused to relinquish the belief that the ghost of the dead captain was on board the ship." Henslow had paused before completing the thought. "And speaking of suicide, you will remember that Lord Castlereagh's career came to an inglorious end a little more than a decade ago when he slit his throat. He was FitzRoy's uncle. The poor lad was only 15 at the time. It seems that self-destruction is a motif in his life. I wouldn't be surprised if that doesn't account for his need for some companionship at sea. He can hardly talk to the lower officers, can he?"

But melancholia did not seem to sit on the man's shoulders. His long-lashed, almost feminine eyes sparkled and his voice was light as he described the trim beauty of the *Beagle*, currently being refitted at Plymouth, and the hard freedom of the open seas. The trip was to last two years, but—who could say?—it might extend to three or even four. He said the primary purpose was to chart the coast of South America, and the secondary was to refine the measurements of longitude by taking chronological readings around the world.

"Why South America?" put in Charles, almost breathless with excitement.

"The sailing is treacherous, rough currents, uncertain winds. The Admiralty wants up-to-date charts, the finest we can deliver, every cove and shore line in detail." His voice dropped conspiratorially. "Trade is increasing, you see, especially with Brazil. The days of Spain are over and we must show the flag, keep the ports open for our vessels. We have the Falklands. Argentina's in a perennial uproar. The Americans are poking around. We already have a squadron of men-of-war outside Rio."

Charles read the turn in conversation as a good sign. But he was taken aback a moment later when FitzRoy abruptly leaned forward and demanded, in a non-sequitur, whether it was true that he was the grandson of Erasmus Darwin, the famed physician, philosopher and "free-thinker." FitzRoy emphasized the word free. Charles admitted that he was.

mentary mission house on a quiet spot above the beach and hundreds of canoes bearing Indians arrived from all directions. On Sunday, the missionary decided to hold a service in the house. Dressed in clean shirts, leaving only the cook on board, the crew rowed to the beach and made their way through crowds of Indians. The cook watched from the boat. Once the captain and crew were inside, the Indians seized the longboat and pushed it into the water. A hymn struck up from within the house, then an outcry, then shrieks. The white men stumbled out into the sunlight, as the Indians pursued them, beating them with clubs and stones. Others arrived with spears. One sailor made it to the water, waded out to his waist, and was felled with a stone to the temple. The beach was soaked in blood. The terrified cook lowered a dinghy, rowed frantically to shore and disappeared into the woods. He was rescued half-crazed, months later, by a ship sent to investigate, naked and covered with boils, his eyebrows and beard plucked out by the Indians. He told a tale of horror. The ship that returned him to the Falklands also brought Jemmy Button.

Mr. Snow sighed and said: "I expect you know the rest from the newspapers." And indeed, I did. An official inquiry was held. Amid a welter of confusing testimony and political opinion running against the Patagonian Missionary Society, Jemmy was found not guilty, despite the statements of the cook, who said, among other things, that Mr. Button had climbed aboard the ship after the massacre and spent the night sleeping in the captain's quarters.

"All very sad," opined Mr. Snow. "But I knew in my bones that something like this would happen. It was a chain of events set in motion by the meeting of the first Englishman and the first Indian. It was preordained from the moment that Captain FitzRoy tore that button from his uniform and paid for that young boy."

I felt myself nodding in agreement.

"And as I expected, it has ended badly for the Indians. At last report, their ranks have been decimated by disease. Here, look at this—"

And so saying, he handed me a copy of the Mission's newsletter, the *Voice of Pity*. I saw there an article reporting "a burst of mournful news"—the death of Jemmy Button. Mr. Snow waited until I had read it, then spoke again.

"I knew that underneath all the smiles and bowing, Jemmy didn't really have respect for the glories of Western culture. That very first evening on board, when I found him after his long reversion to his primitive habitation,