



## Captain FitzRoy of the Beagle, drawn by midshipman P. G. King

Charles Darwin said of Robert  
Fitzroy in his autobiography--

“FitzRoy’s character was a singular one, with very many noble features: he was devoted to his duty, generous to a fault, bold, determined, and indomitably energetic, and an ardent friend to all under his sway. He would undertake any sort of trouble to assist those whom he thought deserved assistance. He was a handsome man, strikingly like a gentleman, with highly-courteous manners, which resembled those of his maternal uncle, the famous Lord Castlereagh, as I was told by the Minister at Rio.....FitzRoy’s temper was a most unfortunate one. It was usually worst in the early morning, and with his eagle eye he would generally detect something amiss about the ship and then was unsparing in his blame. He was very kind to me, but was a man very difficult to live with on the intimate terms that necessarily followed from our messing by ourselves in the same cabin. We had several quarrels; for instance, early in the voyage at Bahia, in Brazil, he defended and praised slavery, which I abominated.”

FitzRoy told Darwin that since he seemed to doubt his word (on the general happiness of slaves) they could no longer live together (i.e., eat meals together) and Darwin thought he might have to leave the Beagle, but the other officers invited him to eat with them. Meanwhile FitzRoy had calmed down.

“But after a few hours FitzRoy showed his usual magnanimity by sending an officer to me with an apology and request that I would continue to live with him.”

FitzRoy valued his friend Darwin, who he called “Philos” (short for philosopher). When Darwin was on land exploring FitzRoy would write reminding him how he was missing the opportunity for “sea practice” (getting used to the pitching motion of the ship) – “how unhappy you must feel on firm ground.” He proposed that Darwin might find some fossilized “Megalonyx measuring 72 feet from the end of his snout to the tip of his tail, and an Ichthysaurus somewhat larger than the Beagle!”

They remained friends throughout the voyage but were less close after their return to England.