The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe

Defoe Daniel
THE LIFE
AND
STRANGE SURPRISING ADVENTURES
OF
ROBINSON CRUSOE
Of York, Mariner.
AS RELATED BY HIMSELF.
BY
DANIEL DEFOE.
With upwards of One Hundred Illustrations.

LONDON:
CASSELL, PETTER, AND GALPIN.
LA BELLE SAUVAGE YARD, LUDGATE HILL, E.C.
INTRODUCTION.

E FOE published "Robinson Crusoe" in 1719, under the following quaint title: "The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner; who lived eight-and-twenty years all alone in an uninhabited island on the coast of America, near the mouth of the great River Oronoque; having been cast on shore by shipwreck, wherein all the men perished but himself. With an account how he was at last strangely delivered by Pirates. Written by himself."

Like "Paradise Lost," this romance, destined to so immediate and lasting a popularity, is said to have been offered to "the whole circle of the trade" before any publisher could be found willing to incur the risk of producing it. William Taylor, of the Ship, in Paternoster Row, finally agreed to purchase it, for, it is believed, a very moderate sum of money. He is said to have realised £1,000 profit. Its success was so great that four editions were printed in as many months. It appeared, in the first instance, with the following preface:—

If ever the story of any private man's adventures in the world were worth making public, and were acceptable when published, the Editor of this account thinks this will be so.

The wonders of this man's life exceed all that (he thinks) is to be found extant; the life of one man being scarce capable of a greater variety.

The story is told with modesty, with seriousness, and with a religious application of events to the uses to which wise men always apply them; viz., to the instruction of others, by this example, and to justify and honour the wisdom of Providence in all the variety of circumstances, let them happen how they will.

The Editor believes the thing to be a just history of fact; neither is there any appearance of fiction in it; and however thinks, because all such things are disputed, that the improvement of it, as well to the diversion as to the instruction of the reader, will be the same; and as such, he thinks, without further compliment to the world, he does them a great service in the publication.

There is no truth in the story, so often repeated, that "Robinson Crusoe" was the first tale published in a serial form. That it did appear in a journal called...
"The Original London Post, or Heathcote's Intelligence," is a fact beyond dispute. We have, however, carefully compared the tale as it there appears with the original edition. It is manifestly a pirated copy. Just so much of the work is printed as contains the story, with all the reflections omitted. Besides, the date of publication is subsequent, by a few months, to the time when we know the complete work appeared.

The great success of the first part induced De Foe to write a second, which was published in August, 1719; Part I. having appeared in the previous April. A map of the world accompanied it, to give a greater appearance of truth to the tale, on which the travels of Crusoe were indicated, and its proper place assigned to the island.

In the following preface to it the author lashes with deserved severity the conduct of those who had published pirated and abridged editions of his work:

The success the former part of this work has met with in the world has yet been no other than is acknowledged to be due to the surprising variety of the subject, and to the agreeable manner of the performance.

All the endeavours of curious people to reproach it with being a romance, to search it for errors in geography, inconsistency in the relation, and contradictions in the fact, have proved abortive, and as impotent as malicious.

The just application of every incident, the religious and useful inferences drawn from every part, are so many testimonies to the good design of making it public, and must legitimize all the part that may be called invention or parable in the story.

The second part, if the Editor's opinion may pass, is (contrary to the usage of second parts) every way as entertaining as the first; contains as strange and surprising incidents, and as great a variety of them; nor is the application less serious or suitable; and doubtless will, to the sober as well as ingenious reader, be every way as profitable and diverting; and this makes the abridging this work as scandalous as it is knavish and ridiculous; seeing, to shorten the book, that they may seem to reduce the value, they strip it of all those reflections, as well religious as moral, which are not only the greatest beauties of the work, but are calculated for the infinite advantage of the reader.

By this, they leave the work naked of its brightest ornaments; and yet they would (at the same time they pretend that the Author has supplied the story out of his invention) take from it the improvement, which alone recommends that invention to wise and good men.

The injury these men do to the proprietors of works is a practice all honest men abhor; and they believe they may challenge them to show the difference between that and robbing on the highway or breaking open a house.

If they can't show any difference in the crime, they will find it hard to show why there should be any difference in the punishment.

A few words on the source whence the author derived the idea of his romance will be appropriate in this place. We can hardly doubt that De Foe conceived the idea of "Robinson Crusoe" from the story of Alexander Selkirk. This man's adventures had been made public, and excited considerable attention, seven years before the publication of "Robinson Crusoe." Wilson, the biographer of
De Foe, says, “His real name was Selkirk, which he changed to that of Selkirk, when he went to sea. He was born at Largo, in the county of Fife, in 1676, and, after a common school education, was put to his father’s business, which was that of a shoemaker. Being a spoiled child, he soon discovered a waywardness of temper that gave much uneasiness to his parents; whilst an early propensity to the sea rendered his employment irksome. At length an incident occurred that put him upon indulging his humour; for, being brought under church-censure for irregular conduct when he was eighteen years of age, rather than submit, he suddenly left home, and was never heard of for six years. It is supposed that he was with the buccaneers in the South Seas. In 1701 we find him again at Largo, but the same intractable person as ever, being engaged in constant broils with his family. As the sea was his favourite element, he did not continue long in Scotland, but, going to London, engaged with Captain Dampier upon a cruising expedition to the South Seas. This was the voyage that rendered his subsequent history so interesting to the lovers of romance.

“Being appointed sailing-master of the Cinque Ports galley, a companion to the St. George, commanded by Dampier, he left England in the spring of 1703, and, after various adventures, both vessels reached the island of Juan Fernandez in the following February. After staying some time to re-fit, they sailed again in quest of booty; but a violent quarrel arising between Selkirk and his commander, Stradling, which settled into a rooted animosity, the former resolved to take the first opportunity of leaving the vessel. This occurred at the beginning of September, 1704, when her crazy state obliged Stradling to return to Juan Fernandez for fresh repairs; which being completed, Selkirk bid a final adieu to his comrades at the end of the same month. Upon this island he lived by himself four years and four months, until he was released by Captain Woodes Rogers, in the month of February, 1709. He was then engaged as a mate on board of Rogers’ ship, the Duke, and accompanied him during the remainder of the expedition, conducting himself much to the satisfaction of his employer. At length, after a long and fatiguing cruise, Selkirk arrived in England, in the month of October, 1711, with a booty of £800, after an absence of rather more than eight years.”

Like Crusoe, Selkirk could not settle to a quiet life on shore; his restless nature drove him again to sea; and he is said to have died on board ship in 1723. On his first appearance in London he attracted a good deal of attention, and Sir Richard Steele gave an account of his residence on the island, and his

* Wilson’s “De Foe,” vol. iii., p. 412.
feeling while there, in a paper published in a journal called "The Englishman."

We do not attach the slightest importance to a story dictated by the malevolence of De Foe's political enemies, that Selkirk placed a manuscript, detailing his adventures, in De Foe's hands for publication; but that, instead of doing justice to him, he applied the materials so obtained to his own use. The best authorities have deliberately rejected this idle tale.

In so far as Selkirk passed a certain number of years on an uninhabited island, he may be truly said to have furnished the idea of Crusoe; but if we are compelled to admit that he is the central figure in the picture, the subordinate figures, the grouping, and the scenery are altogether due to the genius of De Foe. Herein he affords an exact parallel to Shakespeare, who derived the plots of his immortal dramas, now from an Italian romance, now from passing events.

Whatever may have been the origin of the tale, however virulent may have been the attacks made against its author, as he himself says, by political enemies and senseless critics, the judgment of the most enlightened men of all nations has placed "Robinson Crusoe" upon a height which no sounds of animosity can now reach. What pleasure has this wonderful tale given, and still gives, to all readers! Young and old, rich and poor, find in its pages an unfailing source of pure delight.

It blends instruction with amusement in a way no other production of human intellect has ever succeeded in doing. While depicting a solitary individual struggling against misfortune, it indicates the justice and the mercy of Providence; and while inculcating the duty of self-help, asserts the complete dependence of man upon a higher power for all he stands in need of.

If we consider novels in their relation to life, "Robinson Crusoe" must win the prize for truthfulness and reality. How naturally the incidents occur! There is no deference shown by the author to the exigencies of his story, nor to dramatic effect. The characters appear as they do in real life—exercise some influence for good or evil on the principal figure in the tale—and then disappear, to be seen no more. Take, for instance, Xury. Would not a novelist of less power have brought him forward, over and over again, after he had once introduced him as the faithful friend of the hero? But De Foe saw fit to do otherwise. Xury is brought upon the stage; assists the escape of the chief personage in the drama; and is seen no more. Is not this the way of real life?

Nor does the effect of reality stop here. So natural are all the characters,