
The biographer of Defoe, like Defoe himself, is a Whig, and of the true stamp; that is, he is a staunch and incorruptible advocate of Whig principles, and of the great aims the leaders of the Revolution had in view, as opposed to the absurd and mischievous doctrines of their adversaries; though this does not bribe his judgement, but rather makes him more anxious in pointing out and lamenting the follies, weaknesses, and perversity of spirit, which sometimes clogged their proceedings, defeated their professed objects, and turned the cause of justice and freedom into a by-word, and the instrument of a cabal.

Mr Wilson cannot be charged with going too copiously or indiscriminately into the details of Defoe’s private life. The anecdotes and references of this kind are “thinly scattered to make up a show,” rari nantes in gurgite vasto. Little was known before on this head, and the author, with all his diligence and zeal, has redeemed little from obscurity and oblivion. But he makes up for the deficiency of personal matter, by a superabundance of literary and political information. All that is to be gleaned of Defoe’s individual history might be stated in a short compass.

Daniel Defoe, or Foe, as the name was sometimes spelt, was born in London in the year 1661, in the parish of St Giles’s, Cripplegate. His father, James Foe, was a butcher; and his grandfather, Daniel, the first person among his ancestors of whom anything is positively known, was a substantial yeoman, who farmed his own estate at Elton, in Northamptonshire. The old gentleman kept a pack of hounds, which indicated both his wealth and his principles as a royalist; for the Puritans did not allow of the sports of the field, though his grandson (contra bonos mores) sometimes indulged in them. In alluding to this circumstance, Defoe says, ‘I remember my grandfather had a huntsman, who used the same familiarity (that of giving party names to animals) with his dogs; and he had his Roundhead and his Cavalier, his Goring and his Waller; and all the generals in both armies were hounds in his pack, till, the times turning, the old gentleman was fain to scatter his pack, and make them up of more dog-like sirnames.’ It was probably from this relative that Defoe inherited a freehold estate, of which he was not a little vain; and which seems to have influenced his opinions in his theory of the right of popular election, and of the British constitution. His father was a person of a different cast - a rigid dissenter; and from him his son appears to have imbibed the grounds of his opinions and practice. He was living at an advanced age in 1705. The following curious memorandum, signed by him at this period, throws some light on his character, as well as on that of the times: “Sarah Pierce lived with us, about fifteen or sixteen years since, about two years, and behaved herself so well, that we recommended her to Mr Cave, that godly minister, which we should not have done, had not her conversation been according to the gospel. From my lodgings, at the Bell in Broad Street, having lately left my house in Throgmorton Street, October 10, 1705. Witness my hand, James Foe.”

Young Defoe was brought up for the ministry, and educated with this view at the dissenting academy of Mr Charles Morton, at Newington-Green, where Mr Samuel Wesley, the father of the celebrated John Wesley, and who afterwards wrote against the dissenters, was brought up with him. Whether from an unsettled inclination, or his father’s inability to supply the necessary expenses, he never
finished his education here. He not long after joined in Monmouth’s rebellion in 1685, and narrowly escaped being taken prisoner with the rest of the Duke’s followers. It is supposed he owed his safety to his being a native of London, and his person not being known in the west of England, where that movement chiefly took place. He now applied himself to business, and became a kind of hose-factor. He afterwards set up a Dutch tile-manufactory at Tilbury, in Essex, and derived great profit from it; but his being sentenced to the pillory for his *Shortest Way with the Dissenters*, (one of the truest, ablest, and most seasonable pamphlets ever published,) and the heavy fine and imprisonment that followed, involved him in distress and difficulty ever after. He occasionally, indeed, seemed to be emerging from obscurity, and to hold his head above water for a time, (and at one period had built himself a handsome house at Stoke-Newington, which is still to be seen there,) but this show of prosperity was of short continuance; all of a sudden, we find him immersed in poverty and law as deeply as ever; and it would appear that, with all his ability and industry, however he might be formed to serve his country or delight mankind, he was not one of those who are born to make their fortunes, either from a careless, improvident disposition, that squanders away its advantages, or a sanguine and restless temper, that constantly abandons a successful pursuit for some new and gilded project. Defoe took an active and enthusiastic part in the Revolution of 1688, and was personally known to King William, of whom he was a sort of idolater, and evinced a spirit of knight-errantry in defence of his character and memory whenever it was attacked. He was released from prison (after lying there two years) by the interference and friendship of Harley, who introduced him to Queen Anne, by whom he was employed on several confidential missions, and more particularly in effecting the Union with Scotland. His personal obligations to Harley fettered his politics during the four last years of Queen Anne, and threw a cloud over his popularity in the following reign, but fixed no stain upon his character, except in the insinuations and slanders of his enemies, whether of his own or the opposite party. It was not till after he had retired from the battle, covered with scars and bruises, but without a single trophy or reward, in acknowledgment of his indefatigable and undeniable services in defence of the cause he had all his life espoused - when he was nearly sixty years of age, and struck down by a fit of apoplexy - that he thought of commencing novel-writer, for his amusement and subsistence. The most popular of his novels, *Robinson Crusoe*, was published in the year 1719, and he poured others from his pen, for the remaining ten or twelve years of his life, as fast, and with as little apparent effort, as he had formerly done lampoons, reviews, and pamphlets.

We are in the number of those who, though we profess ourselves mightily edified and interested by the researches of biography, are not always equally gratified by the actual result. Few things, in an ordinary life, can come up to the interest which every reader of sensibility must take in the author of *Robinson Crusoe*. ‘Heaven lies about us in our infancy;’ and it cannot be denied, that the first perusal of that work makes a part of the illusion : the roar of the waters is in our ears, we start at the print of the foot in the sand, and hear the parrot repeat the well-known sounds of “Poor Robinson Crusoe! Who are you? Where do you come from; and where are you going?” till the tears gush, and in recollection and feeling we become children again! One cannot understand how the author of this world of abstraction should have had any thing to do with the ordinary cares and business of life; or it almost seems that he should have been fed, like Elijah, by the ravens. What boots it then to know that he was a hose-factor, and the owner of a tile-kiln in Essex - that he stood in the pillory,
was over head and ears in debt, and engaged in eternal literary and political squabbles? It is, however, well to be assured that he was a man of worth as well as genius; and that, though unfortunate, and having to contend all his life with vexations and disappointments, with vulgar clamour and the hand of power, yet he did nothing to leave a blot upon his name, or to make the world ashamed of the interest they must always feel for him. If there is nothing in a farther acquaintance with his writings to raise our admiration higher, (which could hardly happen without a miracle,) there is a great deal to enlarge the grounds of it, and to strengthen our esteem and confidence in him. To say nothing of the incessant war he waged with crying abuses, with priestcraft and tyranny, and the straight line of consistency and principle which he followed from the beginning to the end of his career, - he was a powerful though unpolish ed satirist in verse, (as his True-born Englishman sufficiently proves); was master of an admirable prose style; in his Review, (a periodical paper which was published three times a-week for nine years together,) led the way to that class of essay-writing, and those dramatic sketches of common life and manners, which were afterwards so happily perfected by Steele and Addison; in his Essays on Trade, anticipated many of those broad and liberal principles which are regarded as modern discoveries; in his Moral Essays, and some of his Novels, undoubtedly set the example of that minute description and perplexing casuistry, of which Richardson so successfully availed himself; was among the first to advocate the intellectual equality, and the necessity of improvements in the education of women; suggested the project of Saving Banks, and an Asylum for Idiots; among other notable services and claims to attention, by his thoughts on the best mode of watching and lighting the streets of the metropolis, might be considered as the author of the modern system of police; and even in party matters, and the heats and rancorous differences of jarring sects, generally seized on that point of view which displayed most moderation and good sense, and in his favourite conclusions and arguments, was half a century before his contemporaries, who, for that reason, made common cause against him.

Defoe “was too fond of the right to pursue the expedient”; and had much too dry, hard, and concentrated an understanding of the truth, to allow of any compromise with it from courtesy to the feelings or opinions of others. This kept him in perpetual hot water. It was a virtue, but carried to a repeated excess. It set the majority against him, and turned his dearest friends into his bitterest foes. If you make no concessions to the world, you must expect no favours from it. Our author’s blindness and simplicity on this head, amount to the dramatic. He went on censuring and contradicting all sects and parties, setting them to rights, recommending peace to them, praying each to give up its darling prejudice and absurdity; and then he wonders that ‘a man of peace and reason,’ like himself, should be the butt of universal contumely and hatred. If an individual differs from you in common with others, you do not so much mind it - it is the act of a body, and implies no particular assumption of superior wisdom or virtue; but if he not only differs from you, but from his own side too, you then can endure the scandal no longer; but join to hunt him down as a prodigy of unheard-of insolence and presumption, and to get rid of him and his boasted honesty and independence together. While, therefore, the author of the True-born Englishman, The Shortest Way with the Dissenters, and the Legion Petition, thought he was deserving well of God and his country, he was ‘heaping coals of fire on his own head.’ Nothing produces such antipathy in others as a total seeming want of sympathy with them. Defoe was urged on by a straight-forwardness and sturdiness of feeling, which did not permit him to give up a single idea of his
convictions; but it was “stuff of the conscience” with him; there was nothing of spleen, malevolence, or the spirit of contradiction in his nature. Still, we consider him rather as an acute, zealous, and well-informed partisan, than as a general, and dispassionate reasoner. He was a distinguished polemic, rather than a philosopher. Though he exercised his understanding powerfully and variously, yet it was always under the guidance of a certain banner – in support of a ‘foregone conclusion.’ He was too much in the heat of the battle – too constantly occupied in attacking or defending one side or the other, to consider fairly whether both might not be in the wrong. He asked himself, (as he was obliged to do in his own vindication,) ‘Why am I in the right?’ and gave admirable reasons for it, supposing it to be so; but he never thought of asking himself the farther question ‘Am I in the right or no?’ This would have been entering on a new and unexplored tract, and might have led to no very welcome results. As an example of what we mean – Defoe, though a most strenuous and persevering advocate for the rights of conscience and toleration to those dissenters who, in his view, agreed with the church in the essentials of Christianity, was, notwithstanding, far from being disposed to extend the same indulgence to Socinians, Anabaptists, or other heretical persons. Of course, he would conceive that he, and those with whom he acted in concert, were not criminal in excluding others from the privilege in question; but he did not enlarge his views beyond this point, so as to change places with those who entirely differed with him; and in this respect fell short of the philosophical and liberal opinions of Locke, and even Toland, who placed toleration on the broad ground of a general principle, whatever exceptions might arise from particular circumstances, and urgent political expediency. We should, therefore, hardly be warranted in admitting Defoe into the class of perfectly free and unshackled speculative thinkers; though we certainly may rank him among the foremost of polemical writers for vigour, and ability of execution.

Defoe gives a very curious account of the insults offered to James II after his fall, and of which he was an eye-witness.

‘The king (after the Prince of Orange had entered London) had proceeded to the Kentish coast, and embarked on board a vessel with the intention of going to France; but being detained by the wind, Sir Edward Hales, one of his attendants, sent his footman to the post-office at Feversham, where his livery was recognised. Being traced to the vessel, it was immediately boarded by some people from the town, who, mistaking the king for a popish priest, searched his person, and took from him four hundred guineas, with some valuable seals and jewels. The rank of the individual treated with so much indignity was not long undiscovered; for, there being a constable present who happened to know him, he threw himself at his feet, and, begging him to forgive the rudeness of the mob, ordered restitution of what had been taken from him. The king, receiving the jewels and seals, distributed the money amongst them. After this, he was conducted to Feversham, where fresh insults were heaped upon fallen majesty… While there, he found himself in the hands of the rabble, who, upon the noise of the king’s being taken, thronged from all parts of the country to Feversham, so that the king found himself surrounded, as it were, with an army of furies; the whole street, which is very wide and large, being filled, and thousands of the noisy gentry got together. His majesty, who knew well enough the temper of the people at that time, but
not what they might be pushed on to do at such a juncture, was very uneasy, and spoke to some of the gentlemen, who came with more respect, and more like themselves, to the town on that surprising occasion. The king told them he was in their hands, and was content to be so, and they might do what they pleased with him; but whatever they thought fit to do, he desired they would quiet the people, and not let him be delivered up to the rabble, to be torn in pieces. The gentlemen told his majesty they were sorry to see him used so ill, and would do anything in their power to protect him; but that it was not possible to quell the tumult of the people. The king was distressed in the highest degree; the people shouting and pressing in a frightful manner to have the door opened. At length, his majesty observing a forward gentleman among the crowd, who ran from one party to another, hallooing and animating the people, the king sent to tell him he desired to speak with him. The message was delivered with all possible civility, and the little Masaniello was prevailed with to come up stairs. The king received him with a courtesy rather equal to his present circumstances than to his dignity; told him, what he was doing might have an event worse than he intended; that he seemed to be heating the people up for some mischief; and that as he had done him no personal wrong, why should he attack him in this manner? that he was in their hands, and they might do what they pleased; but he hoped they did not design to murder him. The fellow stood, as it were, thunderstruck, and said not one word. The king, proceeding, told him he found he had some influence with the rabble, and desired he would pacify them; that messengers were gone to the parliament at London, and that he desired only they would be quiet till their return. What the fellow answered to the king I know not; but as I immediately enquired, they told me he did not say much, but this “What can I do with them, and, what would you have me do?” But as soon as the king had done speaking, he turned short, and made to the door as fast as he could to go out of the room. As soon as he got fairly to the stair-head, and saw his way open, he turns short about to the gentlemen, to one of whom he had given the same churlish answer, and raising his voice, so that the king, who was in the next room, should be sure to hear him, he says, “I have a bag of money as long as my arm, halloo, boys, halloo!” The king was so filled with contempt and just indignation at the low-spirited insolence of the purse-proud wretch, that it quite took off the horror of the rabble, and only smiling, he sat down and said, “Let them alone, let them do their worst.”

It seems the man was a retired grocer; and Defoe, in his Complete Tradesman, (says his biographer,) relates the circumstance, to show, that to be vain of mere wealth denotes a baseness of soul, and is often accompanied by a conduct unworthy of a rational creature.

In the midst of his distress, the King, it appears, had applied for protection to a clergyman, who treated him with cool indifference. The fact is thus noticed by Defoe:

“When the king was taken at Sheerness, and had fallen into the hands of the rabble, he applied himself to a clergyman who was there, in words to this effect: “Sir, it is men of your cloth who have reduced me to this
condition; I desire you will use your endeavours to still and quiet the people, and disperse them, that I may be freed from this tumult.” The gentleman’s answer was cold and insignificant; and going down to the people, he returned no more to the king. Several of the gentry and clergy thereabouts who had formerly preached and talked up this mad doctrine (passive obedience), never offered the king their assistance in that distress, which, as a man, whether prince or no, any one would have done: it therefore to me renders their integrity suspected, when they pretended to an absolute submission, and only meant that they expected it from their neighbours, whom they designed to oppress, but resolved never to practise the least part of it themselves, if ever it should look towards them.”

In another place, Defoe observes,

“...I never was, I thank God for it, one of those that betrayed him, or any one else. I was never one that flattered him in his arbitrary proceedings, or made him believe I would bear oppression and injustice with a tame Issachar-like temper; those who did so, and then flew in his face, I believe, as much betrayed him as Judas did our Saviour; and their crime, whatever the Protestant interest gained by it, is no way lessened by the good that followed.”

Defoe’s first publication was a satirical pamphlet, called Speculum Crape-gownorum; intended to ridicule the fopperies and affectation of the younger clergy, as a set-off to some severe attacks on the mode of preaching among the Dissenters. This performance bears the date of 1682, when Defoe was only twenty-one, so that he commenced author very young. From that period he hardly ever ceased writing for the rest of his life; and a list of his works would alone fill a long article. He was always a warm partisan of the Dissenters, (among whom he was born and bred,) and was ever ready to take up their quarrel either with wit or argument, for which he got small thanks. He was not, however, to be put off by their dulness or ingratitude. He was old enough to remember the times of their persecution and ‘fiery ordeal’; and it is at this source that the spirit of liberty is tempered and steeled to its keenest edge. Defoe’s political firmness may, in part, also be traced to this union between the feelings of civil and religious liberty. An attachment to freedom, for the advantages it holds out to society, may be sometimes overruled by a calculation of prudence, or of the opposite advantages held out to the individual; but a resistance to power for conscience-sake, and as a dictate of religious duty, rests on a positive ground, which is not to be shaken or tampered with, and has the seeds of permanence and martyrdom in it. What Mr Burke calls ‘the Hortus Siccus of Dissent’ is therefore the hot-bed of resistance to the encroachments of ambition; and when, by long-continued struggles, the disqualifications of Dissenters are taken off, and the zeal which had been kept alive by hard usage and penal laws subsides into indifference or scepticism, we doubt whether there is any lever left, in mere public opinion, strong enough to throw off the pressure of unjust and ruinous power.

Having seen their hereditary, passive-obedience monarch, King James, quietly seated on the other side of the Channel, and being no longer in bodily fear of being executed as rebels, or burnt as heretics, the good people of England began to find a flaw in the title of the new-made monarch, because he was not, and did not pretend to
be, absolute; and to sacrifice to the manes of divine right, by taking every opportunity, and resorting to every artifice to insult his person, to revile is reputation, to wound his feelings, and to cramp and thwart his measures for his own and their common safety. The Tories and high-fliers lamented that the crown was without its most precious jewel and ornament, hereditary right; and though they acknowledged the necessity of the case upon which they themselves had acted, yet they thought the time might come when this necessity might cease, and for their lawful King to be brought back again, ‘with conditions’. Pulpits, long accustomed to unqualified submission, now echoed the double-tongued distinction of a king de jure and a king de facto. This party, whose old habits were inimical to the new order of things, but who made a virtue of necessity, tendered their allegiance to the Prince of Orange reluctantly and ungraciously; while the Non-jurors bearded him to his face. The phrase, True-born Englishman, became a watchword in the mouths of the malecontent party; and at that name (as often as it was repeated), the Whig and Protestant interest grew pale. It was to meet, and finally quell this charge, that Defoe penned his well-known poem of The True-Born Englishman—a satire which, if written in doggerel verse, and without the wit and pleasantry of Butler’s Hudibras, is a master-piece of good sense and just reflection, and shows a thorough knowledge both of English history and of the English character. It is indeed a complete and unanswerable exposure of the pretence set up to a purer and loftier origin than all the rest of the world, instead of our being a mixed race from all parts of Europe, settling down into one common name and people. Defoe’s satire was so just and true, that it drove the cant, to which it was meant to be an anecdote, out of fashion.

Bodies of men seldom retract or atone for injuries they have have done to individuals. It will hardly seem credible to the modern reader, that in pursuance of this old sectarian grudge, and in conformity with the same narrow spirit, some years after this, when Queen Anne, who, from the death of her son, Prince George, had no hope of leaving an heir to the crown, turned her thoughts to the restoration of the Pretender, and when Defoe, in the general alarm and agitation which this uncertainty of the designs of the Court occasioned, endeavoured to ridicule and defeat the project, by pointing out, in his powerful and inimitable way, the incalculable benefits that would ensue from setting aside the Hanoverian succession, and bringing in the right line, one William Benson, (a Dissenter, a staunch friend to the House of Hanover, and the same who had a monument erected to Milton,) in his absurd prejudice against Defoe, in his conviction that he was a renegade and a Marplot, and in his utter incapacity to conceive the meaning of irony, actually set on foot a prosecution against the author as in league with the Pretender; wanted to have him accused of high treason, and obstinately persisted in, and returned to the charge; and that it was only through the friendly zeal and interest of Harley, and his representations to the queen, that he was pardoned and released from Newgate, whither he had been committed on the judges’ warrant, for writing something in defence of his pamphlet, after its presentation by the Grand Jury, and his being compelled to give bail to appear for trial! “The force of dulness could no farther go.”

Defoe had before this given violent offence to the Dissenters, by dissenting from and ‘disobliging’ them on a number of technical and doubtful points - a difference of which they seemed more tenacious than of the greatest affronts or deadliest injuries. Among others, he had opposed the principle of occasional conformity; that is, the liberty practised by some Dissenters, of going to church during
their appointment to any public office, as they were prohibited from attending their own places of worship in their official costume. Nothing could be clearer, than that, if it was a point of conscience with these persons not to conform to the service of the established church, their being chosen mayor, sheriff, or alderman, did not give them a dispensation to that purpose. But many of the demure and purse-proud citizens of London, (among whom Mr William Benson was a leader and a shining light,) resented their not being supposed at liberty to appear at church in their gold chains and robes of office, though contrary to their usual principles of nonconformity; as children think they have a right to visit fine places in their new clothes on holidays. Their rage against Defoe was at its height, when he had nothing to say against Harley’s Tory administration, for bringing in *The Occasional Conformity Bill*, to debar Dissenters of this puerile and contradictory privilege. It was to the kindness and generosity of Harley, on this as well as on former occasions, in affording our author pecuniary aid, of which he was in the utmost need, (being without means, friends, and in prison,) and in rescuing him from the grasp of his own party, that we owe his silence on political and public questions during the last years of Queen Anne; and a line of conduct that, in the present day, seems wavering and equivocal. His gratitude for private benefits hardly condemned him to withhold his opinions on public matters; but at that time, personal and private ties bore greater sway over general and public duties than is the case at present. We entirely acquit Defoe of dishonest or unworthy motives. He might easily have gone quite over to the other side, if he had been inclined to make a market of himself: but of this he never betrayed the remotest intention, and merely refused to join in the hue and cry against a man who had twice saved him from starving in a dungeon. Be this as it may, Defoe never recovered from the slur thus cast upon his political integrity, and was under a cloud, and discountenanced during the following reign; though the establishment of this very Protestant succession had been the object of the labours of his whole life, and was the wish that lay nearest his heart to his latest breath.

We pass on to his Novels, and are sorry that we must hasten over them. We owe them to the ill odour into which he had fallen as a politician. His fate with his party reminds one a little of the reception which the heroine of the *Heart of Mid-Lothian* met with from her sister, because she would not tell a lie for her; yet both were faithful and true to their cause. Being laid aside by the Whigs, as a suspected person, and not choosing to go over to the other side, he retired to Stoke-Newington, where, as already mentioned, he had an attack of apoplexy, which had nearly proved fatal to him. Recovering, however, and his activity of mind not suffering him to be idle, he turned his thoughts into a new channel, and, as if to change the scene entirely, set about writing Romances. The first work that could come under this title was *The Family Instructor*; a sort of controversial narrative, in which an argument is held through three volumes, and a feverish interest is worked up to the most tragic height, on ‘the abomination’ (as it was at that time thought by many people, and among others by Defoe) of letting young people go to the play. The implied horror of dramatic exhibitions, in connexion with the dramatic effect of the work itself, leaves a curious impression. Defoe’s polemical talents are brought to bear to very good purpose in this performance, which was in the form of Letters; and it is curious to mark the eagerness with which his pen, after having been taken up for so many years with dry debates and doctrinal points, flies for relief to the details and incidents of private life. His mind was equally tenacious of facts and arguments, and fastened on each, in its turn, with the same strong and unremitting grasp. *Robinson*
Crusoe, published in 1719, was the first of his performances in the acknowledged shape of a romance; and from this time he brought out one or two every year to the end of his life. As it was the first, it was decidedly the best; it gave full scope to his genius; and the subject mastered his prevailing bias to religious controversy, and the depravity of social life, by confining him to the unsophisticated views of nature and the human heart. His other works of fiction have not been read, (in comparison) and one reason is, that many of them, at least, are hardly fit to be read, whatever may be said to the contrary. We shall go a little into the theory of this.

We do not think a person brought up and trammelled all his life in the strictest notions of religion and morality, and looking at the world, and all that was ordinarily passing in it, as little better than a contamination, is, a priori, the properest person to write novels: it is going out of his way - it is 'meddling with the unclean thing.' Extremes meet, and all extremes are bad. According to our author's overstrained Puritanical notions, there were but two choices, God or the Devil - Sinners and Saints - the Methodist meeting or the Brothel - the school of the press-yard of Newgate, or attendance on the refreshing ministry of some learned and pious dissenting Divine. As the smallest falling off from faith, or grace, or the most trifling peccadillo, was to be reprobated and punished with the utmost severity, no wonder that the worst turn was given to every thing; and that the imagination having once overstepped the formidable line, gave a loose to its habitual nervous dread, by indulging in the blackest and most frightful pictures of the corruptions incident to human nature. It was as well (in the cant phrase) 'to be in for a sheep as a lamb,' as it cost nothing more - the sin might at least be startling and uncommon; and hence we find, in this style of writing, nothing but an alternation of religious horrors and raptures, (though these are generally rare, as being a less tempting bait,) and the grossest scenes of vice and debauchery: we have either saintly, spotless purity, or all is rotten to the core. How else can we account for it, that all Defoe's characters (with one or two exceptions for form's sake) are of the worst and lowest description - the refuse of the prisons and the stews - thieves, prostitutes, vagabonds, and pirates - as if he wanted to make himself amends for the restraint under which he had laboured 'all the fore-end of his time' as a moral and religious character, by acting over every excess of grossness and profligacy by proxy? How else can we comprehend that he should really think there was a salutary moral lesson couched under the history of Moll Flanders; or that his romance of Roxana, or the Fortunate Mistress, who rolls in wealth and pleasure from one end of the book to the other, and is quit for a little death-bed repentance and a few lip-deep professions of the vanity of worldly joys, showed, in a striking point of view, the advantages of virtue, and the disadvantages of vice? It cannot be said, however, that these works have an immoral tendency. The author has contrived to neutralise the question; and (as far as in him lay) made vice and virtue equally contemptible or revolting. In going through his pages, we are inclined to vary Mr Burke's well-known paradox, that 'vice, by losing all its grossness, loses half its evil,' and say that vice, by losing all its refinement, loses all its attraction, We have in them only the pleasure of sinning, and the dread of punishment here or hereafter, gross sensuality, and whining repentance. The morality is that of the inmates of a house of correction; the piety, that of malefactors in the condemned hole. There is no sentiment, no atmosphere of imagination, no 'purple light' thrown round virtue or vice; all is either the physical gratification on the one hand, or a selfish calculation of consequences on the other. This is the necessary effect of allowing nothing to the frailty of human nature; of never stewing the flowers of fancy in the path of pleasure, but always looking that
way with a sort of terror as to forbidden ground: nothing is left of the common and mixed enjoyments and pursuits of human life but the coarsest and criminal part; and we have either a sour, cynical, sordid self-denial, or (in the despair of attaining this) a reckless and unqualified abandonment of all decency and character alike: it is hard to say which is the most repulsive. Defoe runs equally into extremes in his male characters as in his heroines. Captain Singleton is a hardened, brutal desperado, without one redeeming trait, or almost human feeling; and, in spite of what Mr Lamb says of his lonely musings and agonies of a conscience-stricken repentance, we find nothing of this in the text: the captain is always merry and well if there is any mischief going on; and his only qualm is, after he has retired from his trade of plunder and murder on the high seas, and is afraid of being assassinated for his ill-gotten wealth, and does not know how to dispose of it. Defoe (whatever his intentions may be) is led, by the force of truth and circumstances, to give the Devil his due—he puts no gratuitous remorse into his adventurer’s mouth, nor spoils the keeping by expressing one relenting pang, any more than his hero would have done in reality. This is, indeed, the excellence of Defoe’s representations, that they are perfect facsimiles of the characters he chooses to portray; but then they are too often the worst specimens he can collect out of the dregs and sink of human nature. Colonel Jack is another instance, with more pleasantry, and a common vein of humanity; but still the author is flung into the same walk of flagrant vice and immorality; as if his mind was haunted by the entire opposition between grace and nature—\textit{and as if}, out of the sphere of spiritual exercise and devout contemplation, the whole actual world was a necessary tissue of what was worthless and detestable.

We have, we hope, furnished a clue to this seeming contradiction between the character of the author and his works; and must proceed to a conclusion. Of these novels we may, nevertheless, add, for the satisfaction of the inquisitive realer, that \textit{Moll Flanders} is utterly vile and detestable: Mrs. Flanders was evidently born in sin. The best parts are the account of her childhood, which is pretty and affecting; the fluctuation of her feelings between remorse and hardened impenitence in Newgate; and the incident of her leading off the horse from the inn-door, though she had no place to put it in after she had stolen it. This was carrying the love of thieving to an \textit{ideal} pitch, and making it perfectly disinterested and mechanical. \textit{Roxana} is better—soaring a higher flight, instead of grovelling always in the mire of poverty and distress; but she has neither refinement nor a heart; we are only dazzled with the outward ostentation of jewels, finery, and wealth. The scene where she dances in her Turkish dress before the king, and obtains the name of Roxana, is of the true romantic cast. The best parts of \textit{Colonel Jack} are the early scenes, where there is a spirit of mirth and good fellowship thrown over the homely features of low and vicious life; as where the hero and his companion are sitting at the three-halfpenny ordinary, and are delighted, even more than with their savoury fare, to hear the waiter cry, “Coming, gentlemen, coming,” when they call for a cup of small-beer; and we rejoice when we are told as a notable event, that ‘about this time the Colonel took upon him to wear a shirt.’ The \textit{Memoirs of a Cavalier} are an agreeable mixture of the style of history and fiction. These \textit{Memoirs}, as is well known, imposed upon Lord Chatham as a true history. In his \textit{History of Apparitions}, Defoe discovers a strong bias to a belief in the marvellous and preternatural; nor is this extraordinary, for, to say nothing of the general superstition of the times, his own impressions of whatever he chose to conceive are so vivid and literal, as almost to confound the distinction between reality and imagination. He could ‘call spirits from the vasty deep,’ and they ‘would come
when he did call for them.’ We have not room for an enumeration of even half his works of fiction. We give the bust, and must refer to Mr Wilson for the whole length. After Robinson Crusoe, his History of the Plague is the finest of all his works. It has an epic grandeur, as well as heartbreaking familiarity, in its style and matter.

Notwithstanding the number and success of his publications, Defoe, we lament to add, had to struggle with pecuniary difficulties, heightened by domestic afflictions. To the last, when on the brink of death, he was on the verge of a jail; and the ingratitude and ill-behaviour of his son in embezzling some property which Defoe had made over for the benefit of his sisters and mother, completed his distress. He was supported in these painful circumstances by the assistance and advice of Mr Baker, who had married his youngest daughter, Sophia.