We avail ourselves with some satisfaction of an opportunity of introducing to our readers an old and valued acquaintance, as one, whom they may have had the misfortune to lose sight of, amidst the perplexities of life, and the competition of more obtrusive candidates for their notice. For our own part, surrounded as we are by the bustle and cares of middle age, the mere mention of our author’s name falls upon us, as cool and refreshing as a drop of rain in the hot and parched midday; for it never fails to bring along with it the recollection of the morning of our life - those green and pleasant years, when the solitary inhabitant of the desert island was perpetually mingling with the day-dreams of our imagination. In general, however, we are obliged to confess, that the admirers of De Foe have too much reason to complain, that one so highly prized should be so early and so entirely neglected. Though, perhaps, we ought not to wonder, yet we must be allowed to regret, that a charm, once so powerful, should be so speedily dissolved, and that the spell-bound captives are so completely disenchanted, as even to forget that they have ever been enthralled. The taste soon begins to reject, as insipid, the simple sentiment on which its vigorous youth was fed, and the dulled palate is to be excited only by that, to which humour has given a zest, and wit lent its poignancy. Perhaps it were unreasonable to expect, that, when sated with the banquet, and cloyed with the too frequent repetition of over-seasoned viands, it should recur to the simple fare of its infancy, and find relief in contrasted insipidity. The present, indeed, in particular, seems an inauspicious moment for making the experiment; when the imagination is daily fed by the genius of the Great Unknown, with the most glorious visions that the fancy of man ever created; when there is nature, fresh and vigorous, as in a morning in spring, enlivened by a perpetual sun-shine of wit and humour; when the passions, gentle as well as fierce, breathe along the pages, now melting with their tenderness, and now scorching with their fervour; where hope and fear, and joy and sorrow, are blended together, as in a face of more than mortal beauty. It is not without a fear of being laughed at for our pains, that we venture to invite our readers to leave this sumptuous banquet for awhile, and to partake of a homelier repast, where nothing is served up but the naked realities of life; where there is nature, indeed, but nature in her simplest and coarsest garb; where wit and humour lend no seasoning, and the fancy communicates no ideal charms; where fiction belies its birth, and is, in spite of itself, cold and sober reality. Should our “Spartan broth” be not suited to their luxurious tastes, they will at least find their account in this temporary mortification of the palate, when they return to their former delicacies with a renovated appetite.

But before we engage in the more immediate consideration of the work of De Foe, the title of which is prefixed to this article, we would willingly bestow a few
words on the singular genius of their author, with a view of proposing our own
doosts and difficulties on a subject that seems to set criticism at defiance. After a
vain attempt to apply those laws which hold in ordinary cases, we are compelled
to regard him as a phenomenon; and to consider his genius as something rare and
curious, which it is impossible to assign to any class whatever. Throughout the
ample stores of fiction, in which our literature abounds more than that of any
other people, there are no works which at all resemble his, either in the design or
execution. Without any precursor in the strange and unwonted path he chose,
and without a follower, he spun his web of coarse but Original materials, which no
mortal had ever thought of using before; and when he had done, it seems as though
he had snapped the thread, and conveyed it beyond the reach of imitation. To have
a numerous train of followers is usually considered as adding to the reputation of
a writer: we deem it a circumstance of peculiar honour to De Foe, that he had
none. For in general they are the faults of a great author, the parts where he
exaggerates truth, or deviates from propriety, that become the prey of the
imitator. Wherever he has stolen a grace beyond the reach of art, wherever the
vigour and freshness of nature are apparent, there he is inaccessible to
imitation. The fugitive charms which are thus imparted, the volatile and subtle
spirit which gives life and animation to the work, baffle and elude the grasp of
mere imitative genius. In the fictions of De Foe, we meet with nothing that is
artificial, or that does not breathe the breath of life. The ingenuity which
could counterfeit works of a more elaborate kind, and much more highly as
well as curiously wrought, could make nothing of a simplicity so na-
ked, and a
manner so perfectly natural. The most consummate art was unable to follow,
where no vestiges of art were to be seen; for either none has been employed, or
its traces are concealed as carefully as the Indian hides his footsteps from the
observation of his pursuers; since to the most critical eye nothing is visible but the
easy unconstraint of nature, and the fearlessness of truth. Besides, it must be
allowed, that the temptation to imitate was as small, as the difficulties were many
and great; for whilst he transcribed from the volume of life with a fidelity and
closeness that have never been equalled, with a singularly mortified taste he
chose the plainest and least inviting pages of the whole book. Those who would
imitate De Foe, must copy from nature herself; and instead of dressing her out to
advantage, content themselves with delineating some of her simplest and
homeliest features.

In the distribution of talents among men of genius, two or three are
generally found united in the same mind, whilst not one of them is possessed in
perfection. But nature, when she made De Foe, seems to have forsaken her usual
practice, and in a playful mood to have sent him into the world, with one mighty
talent for his portion, but destitute of almost every other. Amidst an entire
ignorance of the more elevated passions and feelings of mankind, a surprising
poverty of imagination, and a total dearth of humour and wit, of fancy and
elegance, our admiration, or rather our wonder, is still taxed to the utmost
by a display of invention the most unbounded, and a faculty of imitation the most
consummate. His fictions are not so much the counterfeit of something existing, as
they are themselves the very originals: the creations of his brain do not wear the
semblance only of truth but are absolutely quickened with its vitality; his phantoms,
if such we may call them, steal not forth at even-tide, apparent only when the
actual world is obscured; they walk abroad in the open day, and are not to be
distinguished from the substantial forms and realities of life. No unlucky mischance or awkward gesture betrays the hand that directs their motions: the real author never, for an instant, obtrudes himself into the presence of his reader; the imaginary hero is the only person who appears upon the stage, and of his existence we are as well convinced, as we are of our own. With a confiding security in the genuineness of his memoirs, we follow him over land and sea, engage with him in adventures sometimes marvellous, always strange; accompany him in travels where human foot had never penetrated - sail with him in latitudes where ship had never been, along coasts that were never laid down in a chart; and all the time have not the least suspicion that our companion is a mere shade, and that the author, who has thus led us, in imagination, round the world, never stirred from the desk at which he wrote. Our fellow traveller is sometimes a soldier, but more frequently a sailor, who is merchant or pirate, as opportunity dictates, and always a rogue. But this is respectable society: we are sometimes introduced into company, of which an honest man may well be ashamed, and then we take a trip to the plantations, or skulk in holes and corners to avoid the pursuit of justice. But whether soldier or sailor, merchant or pirate, thief, or what not, we, at least, never suspect him of being an impostor, but give him ample credit for having perpetrated all the rogueries which he so deliberately recounts. All that he does, or says, or thinks, is in the line of his vocation, whatever that may happen to be. His language is always that of the plain and unlettered person he professes himself; homely in phraseology, in expression rude and inartificial; yet like that of one, who has received a distinct impression of objects which he has seen, it is often forcible, happy, and strongly descriptive. Generally speaking, in other fictitious narratives, a tendency to moralize out of season, or in a vein too elevated for the character assumed, or a continued effort to be uniformly wise or elaborately witty, is almost sure to unmask the impostor, and expose “the dreaming pedant at his desk.” Or if these characteristic marks be wanting, either the narrative is inconsistent with itself, or it contradicts some known and established fact, or there is some anachronism, or some other overt act against truth is committed, which critical sagacity seldom fails to detect and punish. But our author is never caught tripping in this way; he moralizes, to be sure, as much or more than most writers, but then his reflections are always in the right vein: he never steps from behind the curtain, to figure away himself upon the stage. Either a vigilance that was perpetually on the watch, preserved him from error, or he went right by mere instinct; or he so identified himself with his imaginary hero, that he became, in fancy, the very individual he was creating, and was therefore, necessarily, always in character. But whatever vigilance he used, he has always the art to appear perfectly unconcerned; there is none of the constraint that usually accompanies a painful effort to support imposture: his hero is not stiff and awkward like a puppet, which has no voluntary motion, but moves freely and carelessly along the stage; talks to us in an honest, open, confidential sort of way; lays his inmost thoughts and feelings open before us, as before a confessor, without caution or subterfuge; and by never asking our belief, never seeming conscious of a possibility of its being denied, fairly compels us to grant it.

A circumstance peculiar to the fictions of De Foe, and which greatly tends to give them an air of reality, is that their subjects are not such as are usually adopted by the writers of romance. They think it beneath them to have aught to do with anything but great names and high rank; or if they ever make a stoop from their
greatness, it is to descend at once into the very lowest class of men, whose rudeness has in it something of the picturesque. Between the palace and the hovel there is seldom an intermediate stage for the genius of romance to put up at, and consequently we never expect to meet with the painstaking people who inhabit houses of brick; dealers in small wares, shop-keepers, and masters of trading vessels, straying through the realms of fiction. Now this is precisely the sort of company into which De Foe introduces us, and their adventures have more the air of matters of fact, in consequence of their names and professions sounding so unromantic and common-place. There is another peculiarity in his fictions, which is still more remarkable. Our author’s indifference to the fair sex is well known, as also that he has fallen under their ban, for having presumed to shew that any story could be made interesting with which they had no concern. Instead, therefore, of the stale and hackneyed subject, a couple of lovers, led through every difficulty and danger which the author could possibly contrive to throw in their way, to be at length crowned with felicity and marriage, he shews us a man struggling for the acquisition of wealth, and getting rich, at all events, by fair means or foul. Of love, at least the sentimental part of it, he clearly has no notion; and marriage, if it happens to be mentioned at all, is quite by the way, purely incidental to the main action, and never allowed to interrupt the grand business of life.

When the hero has made his fortune, the author lays down his pen; the interest of the story is at an end, De Foe himself, during the greater part of his troubled life, laboured under pecuniary difficulties, and in the end is said to have died insolvent. It would seem, therefore, that he was resolved to feast his imagination with what he could not enjoy in reality; and as he felt the miseries of poverty in his own person, and was probably always speculating for the acquisition of wealth, he was naturally led to consider it the most interesting pursuit in which his hero could possibly be engaged. Whatever truth there may be in this, the propensity to accumulate ideal riches is everywhere clearly evinced. If his imagination ever grows wanton, it is in some dream of ideal wealth; if it ever warms, it is in the recital of some brisk trade, which his hero is driving at a profit of a hundred per cent. With what complacency will he enumerate the several articles of a rich booty, no matter how obtained! How he revels in the idea of a stream that rolls down sands of gold, or an El Dorado, where it is to be had for the picking up; or an oyster-bed, where every oyster contains a pearl of immense price! He is never contented with small gains, or fond of imaginary unsuccessful speculations, but delights in a lucky adventure, and enriching his hero with the proceeds: to abandon him, indeed, in poverty, seems to him as contrary to all rule, as any other novelist would consider it, to leave his principal personage unmarried. But this is a disposition altogether unheroic, and savours so little of romance: the employment and pursuits of his fictitious heroes constitute so completely the business of the class of people from whom they are taken, and the arts and practices they have recourse to are so much in the way of the world, that we never suspect these matter-of-fact personages of being the unsubstantial creatures of mere invention.

The grand secret of his art, however, if art it can be called, and were not rather an instinct, consists doubtless in the astonishing minuteness of the details, and the circumstantial particularity with which every thing is laid before us. It is by this, perhaps, more than any thing else, that fictitious narratives are distinguishable from
the genuine memoirs of those who have been eye-witnesses of what they relate. The facts in the one case may be as probable as in the other; the descriptions as vivid and striking; the style as natural and unconstrained; still there is an indefinable something which seems to be wanting to the former, though we may not have remarked its presence in the latter. Some unimportant particular, some minute circumstance, which none but he who had seen with his eyes would have thought of remarking, will always serve, like the scarcely discernible lines on a genuine note, to distinguish between the true and the counterfeit. The eye of imagination, however strong and piercing, cannot always pervade the whole scene, and see everything distinctly; the more prominent features, indeed, it may develop with the clearness and accuracy of an almost unclouded vision, but all besides is either obscured with mist or lost in impenetrable shade, and he who paints from the ideal, must consequently either leave these parts unfinished, or spread his colours at random. It is the singular merit of De Foe to have overcome this difficulty, and to have communicated to his fictitious narratives every characteristic mark by which we distinguish between real and pretended adventures. The whole scene lay expanded before him in the fullness of light and life, and down to the minutest particular every thing is delineated with truth and accuracy. It is not necessary that we should have the light fall advantageously, or wink with our eyes, in order to make the delusion complete by hiding the defects, and softening down the harsh lines of the representation; the most penetrating gaze, aided by the strongest light, cannot detect the imposition or distinguish between the shade and the substance. Writers of fiction may in general be said rather to shadow forth than fully to delineate their visions, either because they flit away too early, or are never seen with sufficient distinctness: like the first discoverers of countries, they trace out a few promontories on their chart; and give a faint outline of something indistinctly seen. In the solitude of his closet, De Foe could travel round the world in idea, seeing every thing with the distinctness of natural vision, and noting every thing with the minuteness of the most accurate observer. His chart presents us not merely with the bold headland, shooting forth into the deep, or the clearly defined mountain that rises into middle air behind: we have the whole coast fully and fairly traced out, with the soundings of every bay, the direction of every current, and the quarter of every wind that blows.

The possession of this marvellous faculty has enabled him to communicate such an air of truth and reality to his fictions, that we are inclined to doubt, whether human life was ever before or has ever since been so faithfully represented, and to suspect that every other author has, more or less, exaggerated or distorted, exalted or debased, the nature from which he drew. It may appear to savour somewhat of paradox, but we will venture to affirm, that De Foe was not more indebted for this superiority to the possession of the single faculty we have mentioned, than to the want of those other powers by which more highly gifted authors have been distinguished. These latter have enabled their possessors to excite every emotion in their readers which the human breast is capable of feeling, but at the same time they have unfitted them to be the humble copyists of nature, and the faithful historians of human life. We mean not to deny that nature formed the ground-work of their fictions, and supplied the elements of their characters, but it was nature wrought up to a higher pitch and raised far above the level of common life. In their plots, for instance, instead of the
ordinary number of events, which would naturally arise in the course of any series of years, we find an assemblage of strange and diverting incidents, such as never occur in the experience of one man, or of any given number of men. The imaginary persons who occupy the several scenes of this drama, are not only of much larger proportions than ordinary people, but form a collection of curious and eccentric characters, such as were never crowded together in any single stage of real life. Their wit, instead of flowing in the scanty stream, in which it really pervades the intercourse of fashionable life, is poured along in a mighty tide, of which the most brilliant society furnishes no example: their dialogue, as has been justly observed of one of them, is not the conversation of gentlemen, but the combat of intellectual gladiators. Their humour is a concentration of all the humours of all man-kind, and runs through their works in a vein so rich, as at every page to excite the laugh that will not be controlled, whereas the dull and serious drama of the world seldom furnishes just occasion even for a smile. The passions, as they are portrayed by these writers, have an energy and terror more than mortal; and grief in particular, an uninviting thing enough in the world of real woe, is clothed with such an air of elegance and refinement, that it becomes a luxury in spite of fact, and is called the joy of grief; the favourite paradox of sickly poets. Then their descriptions of the visible world have a splendour and an illusion inconsistent with the sobriety of reality, and, instead of reminding the reader of earthly scenes, fill his imagination with the wonders of paradise, and the fabled glories of Elysium. In a word, they present us not with a chapter or two of human life, but an epitome of the whole, in which every detail is abridged, and none but the most surprising events fully developed. All that the writer’s experience can furnish of the curious and diverting, whether facts or characters, gathered from every scene of life, and from among every class of men, is crowded into the narrative of a few years, and concentrated on a single stage. This quick succession of incidents, in themselves strange and various, together with the strong contrast produced by the opposition of character, eccentric or exaggerated, produces an effect delightful to the imagination, but no more resembling the tenor of real life, than a landscape, in which the productions of all climates and seasons should be grouped together, would be like a scene of the true picturesque. To delight and astonish, are perhaps the legitimate ends of fiction, and it may be necessary to heighten every colour, and strengthen every shade, in order to produce this effect. We will go still farther, and allow that even, for the purposes of instruction, it may be expedient to exaggerate and embellish, in like manner as extreme cases are put to demonstrate truths, which escape our observation in the course of actual experience. But whilst the reader, especially the youthful one, is delighted and astonished, perhaps instructed; yet, since the characters with whom he converses in the world of fiction are so humorous and eccentric, their wit so brilliant and redundant, the turns of fortune so strange and unexpected, he is led either to form a very erroneous estimate of real life, or, if his limited experience enable him to correct his judgment, is inspired with a premature and morbid distaste for its comparative languor and insipidity.

We shall perhaps illustrate our meaning by an actual comparison, in one or two instances, between De Foe and the writers to whom we have alluded. Both he and Smollett have given us successful representations of a sailor’s life, but in a very different style, and with very different effect. De Foe’s sailor is of the ordinary description of men, one out of a thousand, with nothing very striking or
characteristic about him; the sailor in Smollett is altogether an extraordinary being, whose every action is uncouth, and every expression ludicrous. The one has the usual marks of a sailor, but has everything else in common with the rest of mankind; the other seems to belong to a different species; a creature formed and bred at sea, having a set of ideas, and modes of speaking and acting perfectly distinct from those possessed by the men who live on shore. The one has merely the technical phrase and vices, the homeliness and simplicity, peculiar to his profession; the other is not so much an individual character, as an abstract of the humour of the whole British navy. The one is an everyday kind of person, whom we have seen a hundred times; the other is a most amusing but imaginary being, whom we have never met with but in the inimitable pages of his creator. In like manner Colonel Jack is a common thief; one of the multitudes that infest the streets of the metropolis, and every session sees him hung at Tyburn. But Jonathan Wild is a compound of elaborate villainy; one of the materials indeed she furnished, but the workmanship is Fielding’s, and his alone. An acquaintance with one or two of the tribe; a slight study of the Newgate calendar, or an occasional visit to the office in Bow-street; would suffice to enable the inventive genius of De Foe to delineate the features of an ordinary pickpocket; but the rogue of Fielding is the production of one; who had made villainy his study, and contemplated it in every possible variety. He is the quintessence of knavery, and the traits which went to the composition of his character, were gathered from all the numberless villains that had appeared at the bar of the Westminster justice. He cannot fail, therefore, of being the most striking figure of the two, when he is so much larger than life! But the other is the real thief, who picks our pockets, and then dives down an obscure alley to elude pursuit. Our late acquaintance, Captain Dalgetty (we beg his pardon for introducing him in such company) is, we will venture to believe, an infinitely more amusing personage than any cavalier who ever served in Flanders or elsewhere, but it is precisely because he is more amusing that we lose our confidence in his reality. The Ritt-Master is not sufficiently dull and common-place to rank among the genuine productions of nature, and will scarcely, we fear, be cited as historical authority by the grave and the learned of after ages, as is understood to have been the case with the far less striking, but more natural, cavalier of De Foe. Not to enumerate unnecessary examples, it appears to us that these authors have drawn their characters as the ancient painter did his portrait of Helen. They have not confined themselves to the imitation of any one particular figure, with the ambition of producing merely a living resemblance; but, from materials which their large acquaintance with the various and most striking forms of nature supplied, have created beings of their own, much more remarkable than any that move upon earth, and these they have endowed as richly, and exalted as high above the level of common life, as wit, and humour, and imagination, enabled them. But in their splendid creations we discern too clearly a style different from that of true nature, to be deluded into a persuasion that these archer productions, and if we ever work ourselves up to a weak belief of what we read, it is only when reason suffers herself to be hood-winked, that we may better enjoy the pleasures of the fiction. In this respect, De Foe may be said to have been strong in his very weakness, and to have triumphed by the absence of the qualities which constitute the might of those with whom we have compared him. They have succeeded in captivating our imagination, and even seducing our reason, but he has vanquished our judgment, and baffled our penetration. If he has none of the distinguished merits of these authors, neither can he be charged with the errors which grew out of them; if he
enjoyed not the qualities which are requisite to transport and astonish mankind, he was the better fitted to triumph over their discernment, and deceive them more effectually; for, whilst the possession of one extraordinary power enabled him to delude them into a belief that his fictions were realities, he was not tempted to injure the exactness of the imitation by an effort to improve upon the original. His imagination, if such it can be called, which contemplated nothing but realities on matters of fact, though its visions were wonderfully distinct and accurate, never risks breaking the delusion by taking flight, and soaring beyond the atmosphere of breathing men. Either the judgment reined it in with so strong a hand, as to compel it to go soberly on foot, or nature had not provided it wings wherewith to fly. He had no treacherous fancy to mislead him by spreading false colours and gay illusions on the objects he was about to represent; and cheat him into a belief that he was drawing from the actual, when he was disclosing only some vision of an ideal world. His was not a melancholy soul, which looked on the dark side of things, nor a merry one, that sought and found occasion for a laugh in every event of life; it was neither gloomy nor gay, but had a sort of cheerful sedateness which prevented him from being too sombre or too brilliant for truth. In short, he beheld nothing but what was, and saw every thing just as it was. He could not be more bountiful to the creatures of his invention than nature had been to him, and not being eminently gifted with wit and humour himself, he was safe from the temptation of making his imaginary persons more witty and humorous than would have been consistent with the simplicity and homeliness of their characters. So far was he from colouring his scenes too highly, or flattering his subjects by the force of imagination, that he seems, if any thing, to be less careful to heighten her realities, than expose her deformities. Neither was he anxious to select such scenes for the purpose of representation, as combined the greatest number of picturesque and striking forms, but contented himself with the most ordinary portion of the common field of men and manners. It is to be wished, indeed, that he had been more scrupulous or more ambitious in his choice of subjects, for most commonly his inimitable skill is lavished on objects which hardly seem worth the trouble of representation. But he was a painter after the Flemish fashion, took every line and feature with laborious accuracy, and so he did but produce a staring likeness, seems to have cared very little what the thing represented was; or, if he had any predilection, it was for objects that were coarse, vulgar, and indelicate. The merit of such representation appears to us to be much the same as that of the false curtain, which was drawn so inimitably as to deceive even the knowing glance of a brother artist. It was a curtain, neither more nor less, as long as the cheat remained undiscovered, and then it became a wonder and a marvel.

But this censure applies chiefly to those works which are not often heard of, and seldom read. He has not always been equally unfortunate in his choice; in one or two instances the subject is worthy of the artist, and in that, in particular, by which he is popularly known, the design is as well chosen as the conduct of the story is admirable. It was indeed a happy moment, in which the idea of that most perfect and delightful of all fictions was conceived; and if the perusal of any work deserves to be accounted an epoch in a man’s life, we know of none that is better entitled, from the interest it creates, and the irresistible hold it takes on the imagination, to be considered in the light of one. Whether it be that the fancy was then young, and ardent, and therefore more easily impressed, or that the fiction, by its romantic simplicity, was particularly adapted to the youthful taste, certain it is, that even after the lapse of many years, its scenes and incidents remain imprinted on the mind, in colours more fresh and
enduring than the chief of those, with which we have more recently become acquainted. Like persons advanced in age, on whom passing events make little impression, and dwell not in their memory, we sometimes attempt as vainly to recall the fictions we have lately perused, as we try to bring to mind the particulars of a morning dream. The truth is, they were themselves as shadowy, obscure, and unconnected, as a dream, and therefore not better calculated to leave a more durable impression behind. But this, like some long remembered scene of youth, no time can obliterate, and no fresher images banish from our recollection. That island placed “far amidst the melancholy main,” and remote from the track of human wanderings, is to this day the greenest spot in memory. Even at this distance of time, the scene expands before us as clearly and distinctly as when we first beheld it : we still see its green savannahs and silent woods, which mortal footstep had never disturbed : its birds of strange wing, that had never heard the report of a gun; its goats browsing securely in the vale, or peeping over the heights, in alarm at the first sight of man. We can yet follow its forlorn inhabitant on tip-toe, with suspended breath, prying curiously into every recess, glancing fearfully at every shade, starting at every sound; and then look forth with him, upon the lone and boisterous ocean, with the sickening feelings of an exile cut off for ever from all human intercourse.

Our sympathy is more truly engaged by the poor ship-wrecked mariner, than by the great, the lovely, and the illustrious, of the earth. We find a more effectual wisdom in his homely reflections, than are to be derived from the discourses of the learned and the eloquent. The interest with which we converse with him in the retirement of his cave, or go abroad with him on the business of the day, is as various and powerful as the means by which it is kept up are simple and inartificial. So true is every thing to nature, and such reality is there in every particular, that the slightest circumstance creates a sensation and the print of a man’s foot or shoe is the source of more genuine terror than all the strange sights and odd noises in the romances of Mrs Radcliffe. But the author, by pursuing the idea too far, and endeavouring to build too much upon the same production, has, like many others, broken the charm which himself had created. We dare say our readers will participate with us in our regret, that the solitary island should ever have been revisited, or, in effect, that the second part of Robinson Crusoe should have ever been written. It is no more than any other island, when the air of solitude no longer prevails, and its recesses, sacred to eternal silence, cease to excite an interest when profaned by the noise and bustle of habitation. We should have been better pleased if it had been left to its original possessors, the goats, so that we might have been at liberty to picture it to ourselves, returning to its former deserted condition; the parrots flying about the woods, repeating the few words they had learnt of man; the corn growing wild about the island, and an occasional chance bringing only the savage in his canoe, to wonder at the few remaining marks of human habitation. The solitary himself, when he ceases to be such, grows vulgar and common-place : as a wealthy trader, surrounded with the comforts and conveniences of life, he is nothing more to us than Captain Singleton, or any other adventurer : the moment he puts off his goat-skin coat and cap, to resume the dress of a man of the world, we lose an old acquaintance. This feeling may perhaps have influenced our judgment, or the unfavourable comparison we are continually compelled to make, may operate to its disadvantage; but we cannot help thinking the second part of Robinson Crusoe, unequal in talent, and certainly inferior in interest, to some of our author’s less popular works.
But it is time for us to turn our attention to the book which we at present more particularly wish to recommend to the notice of such of our readers as have not met with it, or of those who have no objection to allow us to read it for them. The Memoirs before us profess to be those of a Cavalier, who served in the army of Gustavus Adolphus in Germany, and afterwards in that of Charles I in England. The character is one of common occurrence in those days, when the peace-loving administration of James forced the more adventurous and spirited of the English youth to seek employment abroad, and thus filled the armies of foreign princes with brave and skilful officers. Of these, some were men of birth and fortune, who deemed a campaign or two, with the Protestant armies on the continent, indispensably necessary to the character of an accomplished cavalier; and others were needy adventurers, who transferred themselves from one service to another, as it suited their interest or inclination, careless of the cause, and true only for the term of their engagement. A forgotten cavalier, of the latter description, to whom we have already alluded, has lately been called into existence by the hand of a mighty magician, and presented to the wondering eyes of the present curious generation, man and horse, in full costume. Our cavalier belongs to the former class of adventurers, and, as might be expected, loses, in point of interest, what he gains in respectability. Though not devoid of characteristic or amusing traits, we have little interest in him, except as the person whom we are confident did actually see, and hear, and do, what is related in the simple and soldier-like narrative before us; and our only surprise is, when we learn that this matter-of-fact cavalier, with the truth of whose adventures we are so strongly impressed, is, after all, nothing but a mere shadow, that owes its imaginary existence to a wizard of the elder time, hardly less amusing in his way than the one to whom we have just now alluded. But we choose to overlook this trifling flaw in our hero’s descent, and will take him on his word to have been a substantial bona fide personage, and descended of that very good family near Shrewsbury, from which he claims to have sprung.

We are not detained long with the particulars of his nonage; a dream of his mother’s, previous to his birth, of which she, “who was mighty observant that way,” had taken minutes and registered in the first leaf of her prayer book, is recorded - a slight mention of his family and education is made - and, in the third page, we find him a well-grown young gentleman, who has kept his terms at the university, riding leisurely home, after a hard chase with his father, a Shropshire gentleman of plentiful fortune. The latter takes occasion to enter into a discourse with him concerning the manner of his settling in the world, and proposes marriage and an establishment - terms which sound rather ungraciously in the ears of one, whom the beating of a kettle-drum had ushered into the world, and whose head, even in the pacific life of the cloister, had been running upon warlike adventures. Finding the military fever very strong upon him, his father gives him leave to try what a two years’ sojourn among the “fighting people” will do, towards abating the current of his blood, and inducing more peaceful inclinations. Accordingly, having chosen for his companion an intimate college acquaintance, who was of a generous and free temper, and had the lines of a soldier written in his countenance, he embarks at Dover, on the 22nd of April, 1630.
We can only assure our readers, that if they are of a warlike mood, they cannot make the same tour in better company than in that of our cavalier. A campaign is in general a dull thing enough in the perusal, unless it be in a country that has seldom been visited by war, where the scenery is picturesque, and the manners of the people curious and interesting. But in Germany - that high road of Europe - that stage on which the royal gladiators have been in the habit of fighting out their quarrels, time out of mind - it is more than usually dry and professional. The tactician, doubtless, will derive his best instructions from these wars on a grand scale, where all the business of slaughter is transacted secundum artem, but the general reader is wearied out by the repetition of marches - countermarches - entrenchments, and the like; unrelieved by any peep at a pleasant country by the way, and undiversified by any amusing or characteristic details. The present narrative, however, though “horribly stuffed with circumstance of war,” interests us not a little, in spite of our cavalier’s being so fond of the smell of gunpowder, and having eyes for nothing but the goodly array of men at arms. The fictitious part is so skilfully blended with the historical, that the whole is perfectly of a piece, and has all the life and vivacity which characterise the relations of those who have witnessed what they describe. It is thus that fiction is made to give truth and reality to authentic narrative, and a dull gazette, like the Swedish Intelligencer (the rude mine from which De Foe seems to have derived his materials) is quickened with life, and presents a moving scene by flood and field. The reader’s imagination is by their means wonderfully assisted, and he is enabled to transport himself in idea in the very midst of things; a power essentially requisite to render the perusal of history either entertaining or profitable. The incidents follow one another in quick and lively succession, and are related in an easy unaffected style, which is usually vigorous, and occasionally happy. Besides, the tone of the work is so perfectly military - there is such a cheerful and hardy indifference to the casualties of war, that its horrors are partly concealed, and the reader’s imagination is hurried so lightly over the stricken field, that his sensibility is never painfully awakened. Then his Swedish majesty, as the cavalier well observes, makes war in such a pleasant sort of way! He is so certain to beat the enemy! And we move on in such a continued career of victory. The chase is so hotly and eagerly pursued, that there is no time for thought - the deed is first done, and then considered of - perpendicular walls are scaled in a twinkling, and men, in their hurry, spike themselves on the points of the enemy’s weapons - a soldier falls, and becomes his comrade’s stepping-stool - there is no room for ceremony or sympathy - none look aside - one object is in the view of all, and that is straight before them - in the midst of fire and smoke, the town is won - victoria! Men have now leisure to wipe their brows and wonder at their achievements. Such was the way of fighting under the “glorious King of Sweden - the lion of the north, and the champion of the Protestant cause.”

After the death of Gustavus, our cavalier quits the Swedish service, but cannot find in his heart to leave Germany, where he spends two years in wandering up and down, like a ghost around his buried treasure, sometimes in the army, sometimes out of it. But at length the tide changes - the Swedes are vanquished, and the Imperialists cry victoria! in their turn. The cavalier, who has a natural dislike of being beaten, and no satisfaction in belonging to the wrong side, at this crisis gave his friends, the Swedes, over for lost, and fairly takes his departure; making good an observation, which is put in the mouth of Gustavus Adolphus, “You English gentlemen are too forward in the wars, which makes you leave them too soon.”
The story of the civil war is told with a candour and fairness, which cannot but recommend it to the reader; and the narrative possesses all the merits which we remarked of the former part of the memoirs, joined to a subject of much deeper and more powerful interest. It is said to have been a favourite work of Lord Chatham’s, and was long believed by him to be genuine: this circumstance will, we doubt not, recommend it more powerfully to our readers, than any thing we could possibly find to say in its behalf. [...]