
There can be no risk in affirming, that *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* possesses an intrinsic merit so excellent, so superlative, and, in its kind, so various, as to constitute this book one of those rare productions which may appeal with unrivalled pretensions, to the favour of persons of all conditions, and minds of every construction and taste.

The original manuscript, it is authentically known, was purchased in the year 1719, by one Taylor, after almost every bookseller had declined the offer; a circumstance, less demonstrative, perhaps, of the superior discernment of that individual, than bespeaking a marvellous lack of judgement and taste elsewhere. It was published in two separate parts, successively. The first part was ushered into the world by a preface, chiefly remarkable for its brevity and simplicity. The original editor, De Foe, anticipating, it seems, with the consciousness of desert, and also with that modesty which attends it, the approbation of the public, in his announcement says:

> 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, are to be found extant; the life of one man being scarce capable of 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 example, and to justify and honour the wisdom of Providence in all the variety of our 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. However this may be (for all such things are disputed), he is of opinion 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 farther compliment to the world, he does them a great service in the publication.

Unquestionably, on this point, there can be no hesitation in pronouncing, that there is as much internal evidence of the reality of the circumstances which form the substance of this “strange, surprising, history”, as of numerous printed accounts of shipwrecks, and other disastrous adventures, or hazardous escapes, which have been presented to the public, under the sanction of names, the superior respectability, and the authenticity of which, have never been called in question. This sentiment receives strong confirmation from a passage in the preface to a publication which appeared the year after the *Adventures*; namely the *Serious Reflections*. It is worthy of particular notice, as presenting a declaration on this head, purporting to be a decisive answer in direct terms to all insinuations of an opposite description.

I ROBINSON CRUSOE, being at this time in perfect and sound memory (thanks be to God therefore), do hereby declare their objection is an invention, scandalous in design, and false in fact; and do affirm, that the story, though allegorical is also historical; and that it is the beautiful
representation of a life of unexampled misfortunes; and of a variety not to be met with in the world: sincerely adapted to, and intended for, the common good of mankind; and designed at first, as it is now farther applied, to the most serious uses possible.

This deposition, countenanced as it was by the plain and honest complexion of the narrative, and by what was yet more valid, the most abundant favour of the public, and the rapid circulation of the work, (for Taylor is said to have gained a thousand pounds, a marvellous profit in those days!) appears to have speedily put down all invidious attempts to impeach the credit and veracity of this delightful history: in the same year at the distance of only four months from the publication of the first volume, a second was announced; and, although assailed like the former, probably from the same quarter, and certainly with the same malignity, it triumphed like its predecessor, by the pure ascendancy of exalted merit; the shafts of malevolence were levelled in vain; the adversary was compelled to retire from the field, and Robinson Crusoe, with his man Friday, were left in undisputed possession of the ground which they had won by superior virtue.

In the preface to the second part, we find the Editor complaining of the continuance of envious attempts to the prejudice of the work, and of practices detrimental to the best interests of literature, instigated by the workings of a mercenary spirit. To complete this historical sketch, we here transcribe that document also:

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 envious persons 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 ineffectual, 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 legitimate 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 ingenuous reader, be every way as profitable and diverting; and this makes the abridging this work as scandalous as it is knavish and ridiculous, seeing, while 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 if they would, at the same time, pretend, that the author has supplied the story out of his invention, they take from it the improvement, which alone recommends that invention to wise and good men. The injury these men do the proprietor of this work, is a practice all honest men abhor; and he believes he may challenge them to show the difference between that and robbing on the highway, or breaking open a house. If they cannot show
any difference in the crime, they will find it hard to show why there
should be any difference in the punishment; and he will answer for it, that
nothing shall be wanting on his part to do them justice.

In thus bringing under the eye of the reader the original remarks with which
Robinson Crusoe was ushered into the world, it may not be supposed that the present
editor is answering objections which truth never countenanced, and time has rendered
obsolete; much less, that he is courting approbation, where there already exists a
broad foundation of assured applause: rather let it be understood, that it was
considered a desirable and proper thing to introduce the present undertaking (which
may be said to form, as it were, a new era in the circulation of the work) with
something in the shape of a literary preamble, illustrative of the publication, and of its
public heralds from the date of its first appearance.

In no other view do we stop to notice the superfluous importance which has
been attached to the old story of Alexander Selkirk’s papers. Whether the original
editor De Foe, did or did not, in any shape, apply to the more perfect illustration of his
own original matter, any of the information imagined to have come from that source,
is one of those idle problems, the studious discussion of which affords an eminent
proof of the charm which attaches to mystery, and of the propensity of scholars to
indulge in speculations, which not all the wit or power of man can bring to a sure
conclusion. The real limits of the enquiry are, in truth, extremely narrow. It is an
undisputed fact that Captain Woodes-Rogers revealed the whole of Selkirk’s story to
the world in the year 1712; and consequently that it had been full seven years in print
at the time when Robinson Crusoe was presented unto the public: in common with all
other printed information, it was open to the consultation and familiar to the
knowledge of thousands of readers; and in its nature was such as every inquisitive and
reflecting mind must have received and retained a strong impression of: is it to be
charged, then, as a crime to a literary man of that day, if it should appear, that he was
not ignorant of what every other person in the nation was acquainted with? or that,
knowing it, should use the privilege never before or since denied to any other editor of
adopting, for the completion of what was imperfect in his MSS, any of the authentic
information that was current at the time, and which, in fact, had become the domain of
literature, and was mixed up with the floating mass of general knowledge? Or will
any one seriously maintain, that there is anything either strange or dishonorable in the
circumstance of a history, professing to detail the adventures of a shipwrecked
mariner, presenting, in its rough outline, a correspondence with the features of some
other narrative, recording the particulars of a similar catastrophe? But, indeed, we
have bestowed more words than enough on a subject so trite and unworthy of grave
attention. We venture to think it is high time that the learned trifling, so long
expended on this point to so little purpose, should at length give place to the influence
of candor and good sense. It is only necessary to recollect that De Foe was an acute
general satirist; that, as such, he had made for himself a multitude of enemies; and
that these sought the gratification of their resentment in depreciating, with the greatest
zeal, whatever tended most to the exaltation of his fame: this is amply sufficient to
account for the origin of the story about Selkirk’s papers, though not for the strange
and important way in which it has been countenanced, and ambitiously discussed by
the learned of later times: it might have been expected, that the liberality, not to say
the gratitude, of an age which calls itself enlightened, might, in return for the rich
entertainment bequeathed unto it, at least have disdained to cherish the calumnies of
the envious contemporaries of a learned and extraordinary man, a lively and instructive writer.

Robinson Crusoe, in truth, is a narrative which has seen an old age of honour and renown; which has not only outlived the feelings of envy, but which it is impossible for any eulogium now to exalt. During the lapse of nearly a century from the period of its coming forth from the press, it has travelled, like its hero, into the most distant regions, and worn the costume of literature, and the garland of fame in almost every civilized country of the globe: the eye of science and of beauty has wandered over its pages with renewed delight: youth and old-age have been enamoured of its simplicity, and have dwelt with rapture on its heart-moving details; there is scarcely a language in Europe that hath not been employed to multiply the knowledge of these “surprising adventures”; scarcely a scholar of any celebrity, or a preceptor of any distinction, who hath not, in one shape or other, in writing, or in discourse, borne testimony to the matchless excellencies of this attractive record of the most strange vicissitudes. The multiplied grounds which have been taken by such persons for their commendation shew, indeed, by their very diversity, how various and how vast are the undisputed claims which it possesses to the high reputation that it has secured. One has discovered its principal merit in the ingenious display which it offers of the mechanical arts, and their adaptation to man’s common necessities: thus Dr Beattie: “Robinson Crusoe must be allowed, by the most rigid moralist, to be one of those books which one may read not only with pleasure, but also with profit. It breathes throughout a spirit of piety and benevolence: it sets in a very striking light, as I have elsewhere observed, the importance of the mechanical arts, which they who know not what it is to be without them, are so apt to undervalue; it fixes in the mind a lively idea of the horrors of solitude, and consequently of the sweets of social life, and of the blessings we derive from conversation, and mutual aid: and it shows, how by labouring with one’s own hands, one may secure independence, and open for ourself many sources of health and amusement. I agree, therefore, with ROUSSEAU, that this is one of the best books that can be put in the hands of children. The style is plain, but not elegant, nor perfectly grammatical.”

Another has expatiated on the lessons of piety and experience which distinguish the happy sobriety of its page; whilst, in the opinion of a third, it supplies one of the finest records of resources for the shipwrecked, and of expedients under desertion for the support and recreation of unassociated and unprotected man, that have ever in any age or country been presented to mankind. Johnson said to Piozzi, “was there ever any thing written by mere man, that was wished longer by its readers, except Don Quixote, the Pilgrim’s Progress, and Robinson Crusoe?” Thus diversified in its merits, and accomplished in each, is this extraordinary history; to whose enchanting influence certainly England is indebted for one of its ablest circumnavigators, the late Captain Flinders, of the Royal Navy; and for one among the most brilliant of its nautical worthies, Admiral Sir William Sidney Smythe.

By merit thus manifold, and universally acknowledged, the Adventures maintain their celebrity and attraction at this day undiminished, after the passing away of so many generations, during which, works of great promise and capacity have fallen into oblivion or disrepute; whilst the name of Robinson Crusoe continues to be heard with fresh delight, his history is found classed in the ranks of English Literature, and has even become a standard book of instruction in the school of morals.
It has been with a view, therefore, of rendering it still more deserving of the situation which it justly occupies, and more conducive to the important uses which it is essentially qualified to serve, that the present edition was at first projected. It is conceived that there is one peculiarity of merit in this work, which amidst all the notice and applause it has received, has been much overlooked, if not undervalued; and it is time that the attention of the reader should be called to it; this, to specify it, is in a nautical point of view; under which aspect, the *Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* will be found to furnish allusions and facts of a geographical, scientific, and historical nature, that only ask for the aid of illustration in the places where they occur, to become advantageous avenues to laudable curiosity and beneficial research. That there are not merely occasions afforded for such explanatory comments, but that they are really wanted to make the work accomplished, to the full extent of that instruction and amusement which its nature and execution prepare it to yield, sufficient evidence is supplied from the text, or constituent matter of the volume. Thus in one place we find the following observation: “I shall not pester the reader with descriptions of places, journals of our voyages, variations of the compass, latitudes, meridian distances, trade-winds, and the like; such as almost all the histories of long navigations are full of…” However expedient, in the first instance such omissions might be thought, or however (as was probably the idea) it might have tended to embarrass the original account, and “pester the reader”, had such digressions been interwoven in the body of the narrative; it cannot be questioned, on the score of general knowledge, that the entire absence of such technical descriptions is, in reality, a matter of just regret in a book of education, and that the supply thereof has become an important *desideratum*, in the present advanced state of the sciences and arts: this it was imagined, might be commodiously furnished by annotations of an apposite and popular nature, so contrived and introduced as to bring the naval pupil gradually acquainted with a species of learning of the highest consequence to his destination: the dryness of which, it was imagined, would be effectually relieved by the familiar and unrepulsive form in which it is presented to him, as it were by the way-side, in the progress of his intellectual journey.

It is remarked in another place in allusion to an harbour somewhere on the coast of China: “I do not particularly remember the name of the port, having lost this, together with the names of many other places set down in a little pocketbook, which was spoiled by the water on an accident which I shall relate in its order…” The deficiency which this accident has created, in a topographical view, is really a general loss to every reader; but it is especially so to a youth whose profession demands an accurate and extensive acquaintance with the navigation, the havens, islands, sholes, and other characteristics of the shores and waters of the diversified ocean: hence the evident utility of the sea-chart, or delineation of the surface of the earth *in plano* after *Mercator’s* projection, which has been constructed for this edition with great care, and if offered to the public with an assurance that it will be found, in every instance, minutely faithful, according to the latest and most authentic discoveries. Hence, also, in connection with this department of knowledge, the engravings, which have been provided to embellish the pages of our interesting adventures, will appear to have an interest and value, both for the utility of the objects which they delineate, and the exact fidelity of the execution, which, it is presumed, will not be the less manifest, or the less appreciated, when contrasted with the rude and unprofitable fictions which have hitherto disfigured this admirable work.
Again. To illustrate our argument and undertaking once more, on the strength of what is literally advanced in the body of the work: The hero of the Adventures makes it a distinct subject of notice, in a passage of his history, that he had not the advantage of any acquaintance with botany, and deplores his ignorance in this respect as one who was justly conscious of a prejudice hence resulting to the perfection of his details: the want thus created is undoubtedly a diminution of the sources of pleasure and utility of which the subject matter is susceptible, and strongly invites the application of a remedy: this has been attempted, by appropriate expositions collected from the best botanical writers, with an assiduous regard to classification, to constituent distinctions, and to the natural and philosophical uses, and medicinal properties of plants; and it is conceived that hereby a source of refined and animating improvement has been brought under the view of the juvenile reader, calculated in itself not only to enlarge the mind, but to elevate some of the best affections of the heart, and lift it up in wonder of, and adoration to, an all-wise and beneficent creator; for, of this science it may with truth be said, in the elegant language of the academy, “Plantae numerosissimae quibus obvestit globum terraqueum deus optimus maximus, sunt totidem documenta infinitae sapientiae, natae in gloriam sui creatoris et in commodum hominis cujus est eas intueri.”

It remains only to offer some explanation, or, if that be needful, some apology, in so far as concerns the language, or phraseology, which enters occasionally into the annotations, and as to the typographical execution of this book.

Should any of his readers be tempted, in the first respect to object to the frequent use of classical quotation in that department of the Editor’s labours, as savouring of learned conceit, or otherwise offensive, we will beg leave to remind them briefly of the answer which was once made by the greatest literary judge of the age, to a similar objector, who, having charged this practice with pedantry, was silenced with this reply: “No, sir,” said JOHNSON, “it is a good thing: there is community of mind in it; classical quotation is the parole of literary men all over the world.” The study of the classics ought less to be regarded as an exercise of the intellect, than as a discipline of humanity. The peculiar advantage of this mode of education, consists, not so much in strengthening the understanding, as in softening and refining the taste. It gives men liberal views; it accustoms the mind to take an interest in things foreign to itself: to love virtue for its own sake, to prefer fame to life, and glory to riches, and to fix our thoughts on remote and permanent, instead of narrow and fleeting objects. It teaches us to believe, that there is something really great and excellent in the world, surviving all the shocks of accident, and fluctuations of opinion, and raises us above that low and servile fear, which bows only to present power, to upstart authority, to the interest and fashion of the moment. Rome and Athens filled a place in the history of mankind, which can never be occupied again. They were two cities set on a hill which could not be hidden; all eyes have seen them; and their light shines, like a mighty sea-mark, into the abyss of time.

Still green with bays each antient altar stands,
Above the reach of sacrilegious hands:
Secure from flames, from envy’s fiercer rage,
Destructive war, and all-involving age;
Hail! bards triumphant, born in happier days,
Immortal heirs of universal praise!
Whose honours with increase of ages grow,
As streams roll down, enlarging as they flow!

It is this feeling, more than any thing else, which produces a marked difference between the study of the ancient and of the modern languages; and which, from the weight and importance of the consequences attached to it, stamps every word with a monumental firmness. By conversing with the mighty dead, we imbibe sentiment with knowledge. We become strongly attached to those who can no longer either hurt or serve us, except though the influence which they exert over the mind. We feel the presence of that power which gives immortality to human thoughts and actions, and we catch the sacred flame of enthusiasm from all nations and ages. It is hard to find in minds otherwise formed, either a real love of excellence, or a belief that any excellence exists, superior to their own. Every thing is brought down to the vulgar level of their own ideas and pursuits. Persons without education certainly do not want either acuteness or strength of mind in what concerns themselves, or in things immediately within their observation; but they have no power of abstraction, no general standard of taste or scale of opinion. They see their objects always near, and never in the horizon. Hence arises that egotism which has been remarked as the characteristic of self-taught men, and which degenerates into obstinate prejudice, or petulant fickleness of opinion, according to the natural sluggishness or activity of their minds. For they become either blindly bigoted unto the first opinions they have stricken out for themselves, and incorrigible to conviction; or, dupes of their own vanity and shrewdness, are everlasting converts to every crude suggestion that presents itself, and the last opinion is always the true one. Each successive discovery flashes upon them with equal light and evidence, and every new fact overturns their whole system. It is among this class of persons whose ideas never extend beyond the feeling of the moment, that we find individuals who are very honest men, with a total want of principle; and who unite the most hardened effrontery and intolerance of opinion to endless inconsistency and self-contradiction.

If, in another view, any exception should be taken on the score of perspicuity in the terms made use of, in places especially where the notes are scientific, all still more where they embrace recent discoveries in chemistry; the Editor looks for his vindication in this instance, to the essential expediency of the plan itself, and to the approved practice of the most able writers, and only competent judges in the case; which he cannot any otherwise illustrate so satisfactorily, as in the words of a celebrated proficient in practical philosophy, and which are applicable to the language of all sciences universally. “We have the approbation,” says Dr Henry, “by the most distinguished metaphysicians of the age, of the connection of new doctrines with new and more accurate language: for my own part, I adopt them [meaning the terms of the new nomenclature], not from a belief that they are perfect, but because they are better adapted than any hitherto offered, for explaining and classing phenomena; and with this qualification, I strongly recommend them to general acceptance.”7

In an age when every art, and especially that of typography, is carried to a perfection and cost, which have generated a taste that savours somewhat of fastidiousness, an apology may be deemed necessary for presenting this edition to the public in a type less ostentatious and fashionably broad, than is wont to greet the pampered eye of an English reader in the present day; the offense, if such it be, is not surely precluded from all title to indulgence, though it might be presuming too far, to
look for a free and unreserved pardon: if the purchaser finds not here all that
gratification which may satisfy the luxurious habits of our times, it is too much to
express an hope that there are some things in our volume, which, even in this respect,
are not wholly directed of a claim to his approbation? Whilst, in another view, there is
an advantage perceptibly gained, too obvious to be particularized, although not too
small to be felt, which may prove no unsubstantial compensation to him, for what is
lost in splendour of type, or width of margin.

A tribute of liberal acknowledgement is due from the Editor, before he closes
his remarks, to the merits of that authentic record of maritime facts and discoveries, *The Naval Chronicle*; to the rich and various stores of nautical intelligence dispersed
through the pages of which, he has been largely and constantly indebted in the
prosecution of his extensive plan. The Editor takes this opportunity of recalling to the
recollected of sea-officers in particular, a part of the *prospectus* by which that
respectable miscellany was originally announced to public notice and patronage.

In common with the rest of our countrymen we have long beheld with
exultation the progress of our naval power. It has grown up with the dignity of
the British name, and has attained a colossal stature that appals our enemies, and
awes the surrounding nations. What the venerable Camden, in the year 1605,
said concerning *Britaine*, is still, and we trust ever will be, descriptive of its
character: “It is walled and guarded with the ocean, most commodious for
trafficke to all parts of the world and watered with pleasant, fishful, and
navigable rivers, which yield safe havens and roads, and furnished with
shipping and sailers, that it may rightly be termed *The Lady of the Sea*.”

A work, therefore, comprehending all the naval circumstances of Great
Britain, must be interesting to its inhabitants. We have laid an extensive basis;
and the superstructure we shall raise upon it, will, at least, be such as every true
patriot shall approve. The literary department embraces every subject connected
with the navy; and, we presume, will often be enriched with the
communications of naval friends. Biography shall be executed with delicacy
and correctness, and possess all the variety which a periodical work will allow.
Portraits of naval officers will occasionally be introduced, when an opportunity
occurs of making engravings from original pictures. “The difficulty which a
naval officer experiences, when confined to the limits of his station, of
becoming acquainted with what is going on amid the literary and philosophical
world, will induce us to review the principal works that are published,
interesting to the naval profession. The leisure of the mariner will be cheered
and improved by that variety of information which we shall be enabled to
furnish. Whatever tends to elucidate the history of the navy, will be constantly
brought forward; and we hope, by this means, to preserve and make known
many papers, that would be irrecoverably lost. Nautical poems, and lyric poetry
on naval subjects, which have long formed a peculiar feature in our national
character, and come home to every British heart, will be carefully collected.
Commerce is intimately connected with the present subject, and will
occasionally come under consideration. To call the attention of the mariner to
such objects of natural history as may often present themselves to him, will also
be a part of our duty. Treatises, or essays, which relate to naval architecture and
the improvement of navigation, will be particularly considered. Nor will any
subject that may render the Naval Chronicle an useful, instructive, and interesting work, be omitted.

1 Entered at Stationer’s Hall for W TAYLOR, 23rd April 1719.
2 The Editor will particularise only three narratives, illustrative of his idea on this subject, comprised in an interesting book, entituled *Naufragia* : they are : 1. that of Pierre Vial (Volume I, page 191). 2. Captain Richard Falconer, (ibid, page 259), 3. That of Mr Randall (ibid, page 281). Something pertinent to the question of probabilities, and possibilities, might also be alleged with reference to the voyages of Sinbad the Sailor in the *Arabian Nights*; but that discussion would lead us too far beyond the bounds of annotation.

3 *Serious Reflections, during the life and surprising adventures of Robinson Crusoe; with his vision of the angelic world*. Entered at Stationers Hall for W TAYLOR, 3rd August 1720.
4 This was entered at Stationers Hall for W TAYLOR, the 17th August 1719.
5 See Beattie’s *Dissertations Moral and Critical* : “On Fable and Romance”.
7 *Elements of Chemistry*, Preface, page 32.
8 *The Naval Chronicle, containing a General and Biographical History of the Royal Navy of the United Kingdom; with a variety of Original Papers on Nautical Subjects. Under the guidance of several Literary and Professional Men.*