

*Daniel Defoe, The Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner: with a Biographical Account of Defoe. Illustrated with Fifty Characteristic Cuts, from Drawings, by William Harvey, Esq. and engraved by Adams. New York: Published by Harper and Brothers.*

This publication is worthy of the Harpers. It is an honor to the country — not more in the fine taste displayed in its getting up, than as evincing a just appreciation of an invaluable work. How fondly do we recur, in memory, to those enchanted days of our boyhood when we first learned to grow serious over Robinson Crusoe! — when we first found the spirit of wild adventure enkindling within us, as, by the dim fire light, we labored out, line by line, the marvellous import of those pages, and hung breathless and trembling with eagerness over their absorbing — over their enchaining interest! Alas! the days of desolate islands are no more! “Nothing farther,” as Vapid says, “can be done in that line.” Wo, henceforward, to the Defoe who shall prate to us of “undiscovered bournes.” There is positively not a square inch of new ground for any future Selkirk. Neither in the Indian, in the Pacific, nor in the Atlantic, has he a shadow of hope. The Southern Ocean has been incontinently ransacked, and in the North — Scoresby, Franklin, Parry, Ross, Ross & Co. have been little better than so many salt water Paul Prys.

While Defoe would have been fairly entitled to immortality had he never written Robinson Crusoe, yet his many other very excellent writings have nearly faded from our attention, in the superior lustre of the Adventures of the Mariner of York. What better possible species of reputation could the author have desired for that book than the species which it has so long enjoyed? It has become a household thing in nearly every family in Christendom! Yet never was admiration of any work — universal admiration — more indiscriminately or more inappropriately bestowed. Not one person in ten — nay, not one person in five hundred, has, during the perusal of Robinson Crusoe, the most remote conception that any particle of genius, or even of common talent, has been employed in its creation! Men do not look upon it in the light of a literary performance. Defoe has none of their thoughts — Robinson all. The powers which have wrought the wonder have been thrown into obscurity by the very stupendousness of the wonder they have wrought! We read, and become perfect abstractions in the intensity of our interest — we close the book, and are quite satisfied that we could have written as well ourselves! All this is effected by the potent magic of verisimilitude. Indeed the author of Crusoe must have possessed, above all other faculties, what has been termed the faculty of *identification* — that dominion exercised by volition over imagination which enables the mind to lose its own, in a fictitious, individuality. This includes, in a very great degree, the power of abstraction; and with these keys we may partially unlock the mystery of that spell which has so long invested the volume before us. But a complete analysis of our interest in it cannot be thus afforded. Defoe is largely indebted to his subject. The idea of man in a state of perfect isolation, although often entertained, was never before so comprehensively carried out. Indeed the frequency of its occurrence to the thoughts of mankind argued the extent of its influence on their sympathies, while the fact of no attempt having been made to give an embodied form to the conception, went to prove the difficulty of the undertaking. But the true narrative of Selkirk in 1711, with the powerful impression it then made upon the public mind, sufficed to inspire Defoe with both the necessary courage for his work, and entire confidence in its success. How wonderful has been the result!

Besides *Robinson Crusoe*, Defoe wrote no less than *two hundred and eight* works. The chief of these are the *Speculum Crape-Gownorum*, a reply to Roger L’Estrange, and characterized principally by intemperate abuse — a *Treatise against the Turks*, written for the purpose of showing England “that if it was the interest of Protestantism not to increase the influence of a

Catholic power, it was infinitely more so to oppose a Mohammedan one” — an *Essay on Projects*, displaying great ingenuity, and mentioned in terms of high approbation by our own Franklin — the *Poor Man's Plea*, a satire levelled against the extravagances of the upper ranks of British society — the *Trueborn Englishman*, composed with a view of defending the king from the abuse heaped upon him as a foreigner the *Shortest Way with the Dissenters*, a work which created strong excitement, and for which the author suffered in the pillory — the *Reformation of Manners*, a satirical poem, containing passages of uncommon force, that is to say, uncommon for Defoe, who was no poet — *More Reformation*, a continuation of the above — *Giving Alms no Charity*, an excellent treatise — a *Preface to a translation of Drelincourt on Death*, in which is contained the “true narrative” of Mrs. Veal's apparition — the *History of the Union*, a publication of much celebrity in the days of its author, and even now justly considered as placing him among the “soundest historians of his time” — the *Family Instructor*, “one of the most valuable systems of practical morality in the language” — the *History of Moll Flanders*, including some striking but coarsely executed paintings of low life — the *Life of Colonel Jaque*, in which an account is given of the hero's residence in Virginia — the *Memoirs of a Cavalier*, a book belonging more properly to History than to Fictitious Biography, and which has been often mistaken for a true narrative of the civil wars in England and Germany — the *History of the Plague*, which Dr. Mead considered an authentic record — and *Religious Courtship*, which acquired an extensive popularity, and ran through innumerable editions. In the multiplicity of his other publications, and amid a life of perpetual activity, Defoe found time, likewise, to edit his *Review*, which existed for more than nine years, commencing in February 1704, and ending in May 1713. This periodical is justly entitled to be considered the original of the *Tatlers* and *Spectators*, which were afterwards so fashionable. Political intelligence, however, constituted the greater portion of its *materiel*.

The Edition of *Robinson Crusoe* now before us is worthy of all praise. We have seldom seen a more beautiful book. It is an octavo of 470 pages. The fifty wood cuts with which it is ornamented are, for the most part, admirable. We may instance, as particularly good, those on pages 6, 27, 39, 49, 87, 88, 92, 137, 146, 256, and 396. The design on the title page is superlative. In regard to the paper, typography, and binding of the work, that taste must be fastidious indeed which can find any fault with either.