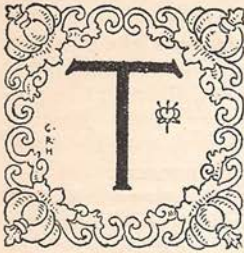


THE AUTHOR OF "ROBINSON CRUSOE."



THE age of Queen Anne was one which abounded in paradoxes, and loved them. It was an age when England was full of patriotic policy, yet every statesman was a traitor; when tradition was dear, yet revolution practicable; when speech was gross and manners unrefined, yet the laws of literary composition rigid, and correctness the test of poetry. It was full of high ecclesiasticism and high Puritanism, sometimes both united in one person. In it ignorance was most profound, yet learning most considered and prominent. An age when Parson Trulliber was not an unfit representative of the rural clergy, yet in which the public could be interested in such a recondite pleasantry as the "Battle of the Books," seems the strangest self-contradiction; yet so it was. In this paradoxical age no man lived who was a more complete paradox than Defoe. His fame is world-wide, yet all that is known of him is one or two of his least productions, and his busy life is ignored in the permanent place in literary history which he has secured. His characteristics, as apart from his conduct, are all those of an honest man; but when that most important part of him is taken into the question, it is difficult to pronounce him anything but a knave. His distinguishing literary quality is a minute truthfulness to fact which makes it almost impossible not to take what he says for gospel; but his constant inspiration is fiction—not to say, in some circumstances, falsehood. He spent his life in the highest endeavors that a man can engage in,—in the work of persuading and influencing his country, chiefly for her good,—and he is remembered by a boys' book, which is, indeed, the first of boys' books, yet not much more. Through these contradictions we must push our way before we can reach any clear idea of Defoe, the London tradesman, who, by times, composed almost all the newspapers in London, wrote all the pamphlets, had his finger in every pie, and a share in all that was done, yet brought nothing out of it but a damaged reputation and an unhonored end.

It is curious that something of a similar fate should have happened to the other and greater figure, his contemporary, his enemy, in some respects his fellow-laborer; another and still

more brilliant slave of the Government, which in itself had so little that was brilliant—the great Dean. Swift, too, of all his books is remembered chiefly by the book of "The Travels of Gulliver," which, though full of a satirical purpose unknown to Defoe, has come to rank along with "Robinson Crusoe." We may say, indeed, that these two books form a class by themselves, of perennial enchantment for the young, and full of a curious and entralling illusion which even in age we rarely shake off.

Daniel Defoe was born in London in 1661, of what would seem to have been a respectable burgher family, only one generation out of the country, which probably was why his father, with yeomen and grazier relations in Northamptonshire, was a butcher in town. The butcher's name, however, was Foe; and whether the Defoe of his son was a mere pleasantry upon his signature of D. Foe, or whether it embodied an intention of setting up for something better than the tradesman's monosyllable, is a quite futile question upon which nobody can throw any light. The boy was well educated, according to the capabilities of his kindred, in a school at Newington probably intended for the sons of comfortable dissenting tradesmen who were to be devoted to the ministry, with the assistance, in some instances, of a fund raised for that purpose. The master was good, and if Defoe attained there even the rudiments of the information he afterward showed and laid claim to, the education must have been excellent indeed. He claims to have known Latin, Spanish, Italian, French, "and could read the Greek,"—which latter is as much as could have been expected had he been the most advanced of scholars,—besides an acquaintance with science, geography, and history not to be surpassed apparently by any man of his time. Much of this information, however, was no doubt picked up in the travels and much knocking about of his early years, of which there is little record. He would seem to have changed his mind about becoming a dissenting minister at an early age, and was probably a youth of somewhat wandering tendencies, as he claims to have been "out" with Monmouth, and does not appear in any recognized occupation till after that unfortunate attempt. He must have been twenty-four when he first becomes visible as a hosier in Cornhill, which seems a very natural, and indeed rather superior, beginning in life for the son of the butcher in Cripplegate. He laid claim afterward to having been a tra-

der, not a shopkeeper, a claim supported more or less from a source not favorable to Defoe—by Oldmixon, who says that his only connection with the trade was that of "peddling to Portugal," whatever that may mean. We may take it for granted that he had occasions of visiting the Continent in connection with his trade. The volume of advice to shopkeepers which is entitled the "Complete English Tradesman," written and published in the latter part of his life, though it does not seem to be taken by his biographers in general as any certain indication that he himself made his beginning in a shop, is nevertheless full of curious details of the life of the London shopkeeper of his time, to which class he assuredly belonged. We learn from this curious production that vanity was even more foolish in the eighteenth century than it is now. We are acquainted with sporting shopkeepers who ride to hounds, and with foolish young men who fondly hope to be mistaken for "swells"; but a shopkeeper in a wig and a sword passes the power of imagination. It is a droll example of the fallacy of all our fond retrospections and preference of the good old times to find that in Defoe's day this was by no means an extraordinary circumstance. "The playhouses and the balls," he says, "are more filled with citizens and young tradesmen than with gentlemen and families of distinction; the shopkeepers wear different garbs than what they were wont to do, are decked out with long wigs and swords, and all the frugal badges of trade are quite disdained and cast aside."

He was born into a world where town could be convulsed by a chance broadside, and the Government propped or wounded to death by an anonymous essayist; when men of letters were secretaries of state, and other men of letters starved in Grub street, and the masses thanked God they could not read; when a revolution was made for liberty of conscience, yet every office and privilege was barred by a test, and intolerance was the habit of the time. He was born the year after the Restoration, and was no doubt carried out of London post-haste with the rest of his family in the early summer when the roads were crowded with wagons and carts full of women, children, and servants, all flying from the plague. The butcher's little son was only four, but very likely retained a recollection of the crowded ways and strange spectacles of the time; and no doubt he saw, with eyes starting out of their little sockets with excitement and terror, the glare of the great fire which burned down all the haunts of the pestilence, and cured London by destroying it. He left school at nineteen, and till he was twenty-four there is no indication that he was doing anything save, perhaps,

picking up notions on trade in general, and as much as a young dissenter could, among his own class, or in the coffee-houses where it was safe, delivering his sentiments upon questions so vital to the welfare of the country; discoursing largely with a wonderful, long-winded, sober enthusiasm, making every statement that occurred to him look like the most certain truth; talking everywhere, in the coffee-house, at the street corners, down in Cripplegate in the paternal parlor, never silent; a swarthy youth, with quick gray eyes, and keen, eager features, and large, loquacious mouth. When, in the disturbed and confused wretchedness of the time, no man knowing what was about to happen, but sure that some change must come, young Monmouth set up his hapless standard, could it be Defoe's own impulse, or the catch of some eddy of feeling into which he had been swept, which carried him off into the ranks of the adventurer? It is said that three of his fellow-students at Newington figure among the victims of the Bloody Assize. Defoe would always be more disposed to talk than fight. He must, we cannot help thinking, have thought it a feeble proceeding to put one's self in the way of getting one's head cut off, when one could use it so much more effectually in convincing one's fellow-creatures. His mind, ever ready to slip through every loophole, carried his body off safely out of the clutches of Jeffreys. Probably when he turned up at home against all hope after this unlucky escapade, his friends were only too thankful to thrust him into the hosier's warehouse, where, no doubt, he would give himself the air of having sold and bought hose all his life.

There is, however, nothing to build any account of his life upon in these earlier years. The revolution filled him with enthusiasm, and King William gained his full and honest support—a support both bold and serviceable, and with nothing in it which was not to his credit. But apparently a man cannot be so good a talker, so active a politician, and at the same time follow the rules which he himself laid down for a successful tradesman. Most likely his mind was never in his hose, and the world was full of so many more exciting matters. Seven years after he had been set up in business he "broke," and had to fly, though no further than Bristol apparently, where he made an arrangement with his creditors. He would seem to have failed for the large sum at that time of seventeen thousand pounds, which he honestly exerted himself to pay, and so far succeeded in doing so that he reduced in a few years his debts to five thousand pounds in all; and, what was still more, finding certain of the creditors with whom he had compounded to be poor, after he had paid his composition

fully, he made up to them the entire amount of his debt, an unlooked-for and exceptional example of honorable sentiment. Some years later, when Defoe had got into notoriety, and was the object of a great deal of violent criticism, a contemporary gives this fact — on the authority, indeed, of an anonymous gentleman in a coffee-house only, though it seems to have been generally received as true.

Neither Defoe's business nor his failure, however, kept him from the active exercise of his literary powers, which he used in the service of King William with what seems to have been a most genuine and hearty sympathy. Pamphlet after pamphlet came from his pen with an influence upon public opinion which it is difficult to estimate nowadays, but which was certainly much greater than any fugitive political publications could have now. He wrote in defense of a standing army, the curious insular prejudice against which was naturally astonishing as well as annoying to the Continental prince who had become king of Great Britain. He wrote in support of the war, which to William was a vital necessity, but which England was somewhat slow to see in the same light. And, most effectively of all, he answered the always ready national grumble against foreigners, which was especially angry and thunderous against the Dutchman, by the triumphant doggerel of "The True-born Englishman," the first of Defoe's works which takes a conspicuous place. In this strange and not very refined production he held up to public admiration the pedigree of the race which complained so warmly of every new invasion, and held so high an opinion of itself. "A true-born Englishman's a contradiction," he cries, and sets forth, step by step, the admixtures of new blood which have gone to the formation of the English people — Roman, Saxon, Dane, Norman.

From this amphibious, ill-born mob began
That vain, ill-natured thing, an Englishman.

It is not a very delicate hand which traces these, and many another wave of strange ancestors; but Defoe's rude lines went straight to the mark. The public had no objection to a coarse touch when it was effective, and Englishmen are rarely offended by ridicule; never, we may say, when it is home-born. The stroke was so true that the native sense of humor was hit. Perhaps England did not, on account of Defoe's verses, like the Dutchman any better, but she acknowledged Tutchin's seditious assault upon the foreigners to be fully answered, and the universal laugh cleared the air. Eighty thousand copies of this publication were sold, it is said, in the streets, where everybody bought the "lampoon," which, assailing everybody,

gave no individual sting. It also procured for Defoe a personal introduction to the king. Whether it was to this or to his former services that he owed a small appointment he held for some years, it is difficult to say, but evidently he did not serve King William for nothing. In the mean time Defoe assumed his business occupations, and set up a manufactory of pantiles at Tilbury, where he employed a hundred poor laborers, and thrived, or seems to have thrived, in his new industry, living in something like luxury, and paying off, as described, his previous debts.

When William died the times changed; the High Church came back with Anne into a potency which had been impossible in the unsympathetic reign of that Dutchman. Defoe had written some time before against the practice of occasional conformity; that is, the device by which dissenters managed to hold public office in despite of existing tests, by kneeling now and then at the altars of the established church and receiving the communion there. Defoe took the highest view of principle in this respect, and denounced the nonconformists who thus secured office to themselves by the sacrifice of their consciences, "bowing in the House of Rimmon." There seems no reason, in fact, why a moderate dissenter should not do this, except that any religious duty specially performed for the sake of a secular benefit is always suspect and odious; yet the obvious argument that a man who could reconcile it with his conscience to attend the worship of the church should not be a dissenter, was unquestionably sound and unassailable in point of logic. Defoe had deeply offended the dissenters, to whom he himself belonged, by his protests; but this did not prevent him from rushing into print in defense of the expedient of occasional conformity as soon as it was threatened from the other side. There is little difficulty in following the action of his mind in such a question. It was wrong and a deflection from the highest point of duty to sacrifice one's conscience, even occasionally, for the sake of office; but, on the other hand, it was equally wrong to abolish an expedient which broke the severity of the test, and made life possible to the nonconforming classes. The views were contradictory, yet both were true, and it was his nature to see both sides with most impartial good sense, while he felt it to be, if a breach of external consistency, no wrong to defend or assail one side or the other as might seem most necessary. He allowed himself so complete a license on this point that it is curious he should be found the public champion of the higher duty. No doubt his utterance to his dissenting brethren on that question was to himself no reason why he

should not defend their right to use the expedient if they had a mind; but this is too fine a distinction for the general intelligence.

The discussions on this subject were the occasion of one of the most striking episodes in his life. When the bill against occasional conformity was introduced, to the delight of the High Church party from the queen downward, and when the air began to buzz around him with the bluster, hitherto subdued by circumstances, of the reviving party, who would have made short work of the dissenters had their power been equal to their will, a grimly humorous perception of the capabilities of the occasion seems to have seized Defoe. Notwithstanding that he had angered all the sects by his plain speaking, he was a born dissenter, and there is no such way of reconverting a stray Israelite as to hear the Philistines blaspheme. He seized upon the extremist views of the high-fliers with characteristic insight, and, with a keen consciousness of the power of his weapon, used it remorselessly. The "Shortest Way to Deal with Dissenters" is a grave and elaborate statement of the wild threats and violent talk in which, in the intoxication of newly acquired power, the partizans of the church indulged, with noise and exaggeration proportioned to the self-suppression which had been forced upon them by the panic of a papal restoration under James, and by the domination of the more moderate party during William's unsympathetic reign. They were now at the top of the wave, and could brandish their swords in the eyes of their adversaries. Their talk in some of their public utterances was as bloodthirsty as if they intended a St. Bartholomew. Defoe took up this frenzied babble, and put it into the form of a grave and practical proposal. As serious as was Swift when he proposed to utilize the superabundant babies of the poor by eating them, Defoe propounded the easy way to get rid of the dissenters, and the necessity of settling this question forever. "Shall any law be given to such wild creatures? Some beasts are for sport, and the huntsman gives them advantages of ground; but some are knocked on the head by all possible ways of violence and surprise." He says:

'T is vain to trifle in this matter, the light foolish handling of them by mulcts, fines, etc.; 't is their glory and their advantage. If the gallows instead of the counter, and the galleys instead of the fines, were the reward of going to a conventicle to preach or to hear, there would not be so many sufferers. The spirit of martyrdom is over. They that will go to church to be chosen sheriffs and mayors, would go to forty churches rather than be hanged. If one severe law were made and punctually executed, that whoever was found at a conventicle should be banished the nation,

and the preacher be hanged, we should soon see an end of the tale. They would all come to church, and one age would make us all one again.

To talk of 5s. a month for not coming to the sacrament, and 1s. per week for not coming to church, this is such a way of converting people as never was known. This is selling them a liberty to transgress for so much money. If it be not a crime, why don't we give them full license? And if it be, no price ought to compound for committing it, for that is selling a liberty to people to sin against God and the government.

If it be a crime of the highest consequence both against the peace and welfare of the nation, the glory of God, the good of the church, and the happiness of the soul, let us rank it among capital offenses, and let it receive a punishment in proportion to it.

We hang men for trifles, and banish them for things not worth naming. But an offense against God and the church, against the welfare of the world and the dignity of religion, shall be bought off for 5s. This is such a shame to a Christian government, that it is with regret I transmit it to posterity.

If men sin against God, affront his ordinances, rebel against his church, and disobey the precepts of their superiors, let them suffer as such capital crimes deserve; so will religion flourish, and this divided nation be once again united. . . . I am not supposing that all the dissenters in England should be hanged or banished, but as in cases of rebellions and insurrections, if a few of the ring-leaders suffer, the multitude are dismissed, so, a few obstinate people being made examples, there is no doubt but the severity of the law would find a stop in the compliance of the multitude.

The reader will perceive by what a serious argument the hot-headed fanatic was betrayed and the wiser public put upon their guard. The mirror thus held up to nature with a grotesque twist in it, which made the likeness bewildering, gave London such a sensation as she had not felt for many a day. The wildest excitement arose. At first all parties, in the shock of surprise, took it for genuine, and while some were even so foolish as to receive it with unthinking applause,—which was the case, according to Oldmixon, "in our two famous universities,"—the more sensible reader of the church party was first indignant with the high-fliers for expressing such opinions, and then furious with the satirist who had insulted the church by putting them into her mouth. Nobody indeed saw the joke, from the fellow of Cambridge who thanked his bookseller for packing up "so excellent a treatise" along with the books he had ordered, and considered it "next to the sacred Bible and holy comments the best book I ever saw," to the "soberer churchman" who "openly exclaimed against the proposal, condemned the warmth that appeared in the clergy, and openly professed that such a man as Sacheverell and

his brethren would blow up the foundations of the church." The dissenters, who were at once insulted and alarmed by the extraordinary threats thus set forth against them, all alike turned upon the perpetrator of the hoax when he was discovered. Some "blushed when they reflected how far they had applauded," some labored to prove that it was "a horrible slander against the church." The Government, sharing the general commotion, placed Defoe in the position of a revolutionary leader who "by the villainous insinuations of that pamphlet would have frightened the dissenters into another rebellion." Defoe himself seems to have had a moment of panic, and fled; he was proclaimed in the "Gazette," and a reward offered for his discovery. His biographers in general assert that he gave himself up with some generosity to save the printer and publisher, who had been arrested; but there are public documents which seem to prove a different procedure, showing how "My Lord Nottingham hunted him out," and how "the person who discovered Daniel Foe" claimed and was paid the reward of fifty pounds offered for the offender, described as a "middle-aged, spare man about forty years old, of a brown complexion and dark brown colored hair (but wears a wig), a hooked nose, a sharp chin, gray eyes, and a large mole near his mouth." However that might be, he was arrested and committed to Newgate in the spring of 1703, and the obnoxious publication—"this little book, a contemptible pamphlet of but three sheets of paper," as he describes it—was burned by the common hangman. It was not, however, till the summer, three or four months after his arrest, that he was tried, and that period he seems to have spent in Newgate in perfect freedom, at least for literary productions, since he filled the air with a mist of pamphlets explaining at one moment that he meant nothing but a harmless satire, and at another exhorting the dissenters to be content with spiritual freedom, and again bursting forth into the rude but potent strains of the "Hymn to the Pillory." He was sentenced to fine and imprisonment, as well as to that grotesque but sometimes terrible instrument of torture. But the pillory was no torture to Defoe. On the last three days of July—once before the Royal Exchange in Cornhill, where his shop had been, and where, no doubt, everybody knew him, once in Cheapside, and again at Temple Bar—he stood aloft, with the crowd surging round, and performed his penance. The crowd in those days was not a soft or civil one. When it indorsed the sentence pronounced by law, its howls and cries, its missiles and its curses, made the punishment horrible. But the crowd had by this time found time to take in the joke. Banter, when it is

broad enough to be intelligible, always pleases the general public, and there must have been some *bonhomie* about the sufferer, some good repute as a merry fellow and one who loved a jest, which conciliated the populace. Instead of dead cats they flung him nosegays; they gathered about his platform under the low, deep arch which once made a mock gate to the city, and behind the bustling 'change, and between the shops of Cheapside, held a series of impromptu festivals, drinking his health, and shouting out his new verses, which were sold by thousands in the streets:

Hail, hieroglyphic state machine,
 Contriv'd to punish fancy in;
 Men that are men, in thee can feel no pain,
 And all thy insignificants disdain;
 Exalted on thy stool of state,
 What prospect do I see of sovereign fate.

Defoe was again ruined. It is to be supposed that when he went into hiding his business had to be abandoned, and all his affairs got into confusion. He was described as "living at Newington Green with his father-in-law, who is a lay elder of a conventicle there." This description, however, is evidently drawn up by an enemy, since his previous bankruptcy is spoken of as fraudulent, an assertion made nowhere else. His biographer, Wilson, informs us that though he had "kept his coach" before this period, the pantile works had now to be broken up, and his business was ruined. He had, though there is no information about her, a wife and six children—perhaps supported by the elder at Newington, who very likely thought, like his brethren, but badly of Defoe.

He lay in Newgate for nearly a year, without, however, to all appearance, losing any opportunity for a pamphlet during the whole time, and laying in grist for his mill amid the strange and terrible surroundings of an eighteenth-century prison. Mr. Minto, in the admirable sketch of Defoe which he has contributed to the "English Men of Letters," seems to think that his hero must have enjoyed himself in this teeming world of new experiences, and that "he spent many pleasant hours" listening to the tales of his fellow-prisoners. No doubt there must have been some compensation to such a man in making acquaintance with a new aspect of life, but it is, perhaps, going too far to attribute a possibility of enjoyment to any undegraded man in the pandemonium described in so many contemporary narratives. Defoe did, however, what, so far as we are aware, no man before or after him has ever done (excepting, perhaps, Leigh Hunt, in whose case we have a vague recollection of similar activity): he originated, wrote, and published a newspaper in his prison. "The Review of the Affairs of France"—that



ENGRAVED BY C. A. POWELL, AFTER COPPERPLATE BY M. VAN DER GUCHT, IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM.
DANIEL DEFOE.

is, of the affairs of Europe and the world; that is, of any political subject that might be uppermost—was published twice a week, and appeared during the whole time of his imprisonment, a brilliant, familiar, graphic commentary upon all that was happening, a dialogue between the imprisoned spectator of life and the busy world outside in which he was both questioner and answerer, pouring out upon the country with the keenest understanding of other people's views, and the most complete mastery

of his own, his remarks and criticisms, his judgment and advice. A newspaper in those days was not, of course, the huge sheet which it has now become. The "Review" was a sheet of eight, but afterward of only four small quarto, pages. It was no assemblage of paragraphs, trivial or important, the work of many anonymous persons whose profession it is to manufacture a newspaper, but one man's eager and lively conversation with his countrymen, full of the vigor of personal opinion and the unity



DRAWN BY C. A. VANDERHOOF.

NEWGATE PRISON. THE OLD BAILEY.

of an individual view. A keener intelligence was never brought to the treatment of public affairs, nor a mind more thoughtful, reasonable, and practical. His prejudices were few — too few, perhaps, granted that the aim was good. Defoe was disdainful of punctilio in the way of carrying it out, he was not above doing evil that good might come; but he had a far higher refinement of meaning than could be embraced by any such vulgar statement, in his subtle faculty of discovering, and all but proving, that what might have seemed evil to a common intelligence was in reality a good, if not the best, way of carrying his excellent purpose out. Up to the moment of his leaving Newgate, however, there was nothing equivocal in the use he made of his extraordinary faculties. He was a free man discussing boldly on his own responsibility, and without any *arrière pensée*, the affairs of England. If he had first keenly assailed the dissenters, who were his own people, in respect of the compliances by which they made themselves capable of bearing office, and then exposed to grimmest ridicule the adversaries who aimed at rendering them altogether incapable, there was in this no real inconsistency.

His championship of King William had been honest and thorough. If he loved to have a finger in every pie, and let loose his opinion at every crisis, there was no contemporary opinion which was better worth having. But now this unwearying critic, this keen observer, this restless, brilliant casuist, this practical man of business, had come to the turning-point of his life.

His liberation from Newgate followed closely upon the advent of Harley to power. When this event happened, it is said that one of the first things the new minister did was to send a message to Defoe in prison: "Pray ask that gentleman what I can do for him." Whether it was in direct sequence to this question, or whether the queen had formed an independent intention of freeing the prisoner, we need not inquire; but he was set free, Queen Anne furnishing the means to pay his fine. She is said also to have taken an interest in his family, and contributed to their support during his confinement. He declared himself to be liberated on the condition of writing nothing (further modified as nothing "which some people might not like") for some years, a condition which he immediately fulfilled by publishing an "Elegy on the Author of the

True-born Englishman," to tell the world so, and took no further notice of the prohibition, so far as appears. The real meaning of this curious statement would seem by all evidence to have been, that Defoe there and then accepted the position of a secret servant of the Government, a writer pledged to support their measures and to carry out their views. At the moment, and perhaps in reality during the greater part of his career, their measures were those which he approved; and certainly at this period of his history he has never been accused of writing against his conscience. Even when, after eager championship of peace, he was obliged by political changes to veer into what looked like support of war, he was never without the strong defense to fall back upon, that he demanded peace only after securing certain indispensable conditions, and that war might be and was the only means of gaining them, an argument most simple and evident to his mind.

Harley has never appeared in history as a great man; but when we consider that he was able thus to subjugate and secure to his own service two of the greatest intelligences of his

time, it is impossible not to respect his influence and judgment. The great and somber genius of Swift, the daring, brilliant, and ever-ready intellect of Defoe, became instruments in the hands of this ordinary and scheming statesman. Once more, with a curious parallelism, these two men stand before us, no friends to each other—"an illiterate fellow, whose name I forget," says Swift, with the almost brutal scorn which was part of his character; while Defoe replies to the taunt with angry virulence, setting forth his own acquirements, "though he wrote no bill at his door, nor set Latin on the front of his productions," a piece of pretension habitual to the time, of which the other was guilty. But Harley, who was not worthy, so far as intellect went, to clean the shoes of either, had them both at his command, serving his purposes, doing his bidding. Which of them suffered most by the connection it is not easy to say. It turned Swift's head, and brought into humiliating demonstration the braggart and the bully in his nature. Defoe had not the demoralizing chance of being the lord high treasurer's boon companion; but Harley made a dishonest partizan, a paid and slippery special pleader and secret agent, out of the free-lance of politics. From this moment the defenders and champions of Defoe have to turn into casuists, as he himself did. They have to give specious explanations to suppress and to account for his shifts and changes, though at first these were sufficiently innocent. The evil grew, however, so that toward the end of his career even the apologist must keep silence; but this is the nature of all evil.

If excuses are to be sought for Defoe's conduct in this first beginning of his slavery, it will not be difficult to find them. The age, for one thing, was corrupt through and through. There was not a statesman but had two strings to his bow, nor a politician of any description who did not attempt to serve two

masters. To hold the balance between Hanover and St. Germain's, to be ready to perform a demi-volt in air at any moment as the scale should turn, was the science of the day. On the other hand, he was a ruined man, with a family to support and nothing but his busy and inexhaustible pen with which to do it. The material inducement of a certain income to fall back upon, whatever might be the chances of journalism, must have been very strong. And what was stronger still, was the delight of his own vivacious, restless, ready mind, with its sense of boundless power and infinite resource, to which difficulty was a delight and the exercise of walking over hot coals or dancing on a sword-point the most exhib-



DETAIL FROM PAINTING BY EYRE CROWE, IN POSSESSION OF J. L. NEWALL, ESQ.

DRAWN BY H. D. NICHOLS.

DEFOE IN THE PILLORY.

arating possibility, in making its triumphant way over obstacles which would have baffled almost all his contemporaries.

In the mean time, however, all that Defoe had to do was simple enough. He had to support peace and the union, two things

which in his free estate he had already advocated with all his powers. He did it with the utmost skill, fervor, and success, and to all appearance contributed much to the great public act which was the subject of so many struggles and resistances on the part of the smaller nation—the union. This great expedient, of which from the first he had seen the advantage, Defoe worked for with unwearied zeal. He praised and caressed Caledonia—upon which subject he wrote one of those vigorous essays in verse which he called poetry—and the tolerance of the Presbyterian Church, and the good sense of the nation generally, which was not always perceptible to English politicians; and even risked a visit to Edinburgh in performance of the orders of the Government, though at the risk of rude handling to himself. In all this there cannot be the slightest doubt that he was entirely honest and patriotic, and acted from an enlightened personal view of the necessities of the case. When the curious incident of the Sacheverell prosecution occurred, he had once more a subject entirely to his own mind, and expressed his own feelings in supporting with all his might the measures of the Government against that High Church firebrand, one of the chief of those whom he had held up to public ridicule in the *shortest way*. So far he was fortunate, being employed upon subjects entirely congenial to his mind, and on which he had already strong convictions. The equivocal part of the matter is that he never ceased to assert and insist upon his independence.

This happy state, however, did not last. Harley fell, but with his last breath (as a minister) abjured his champion not to sacrifice himself, but to come to an understanding with his successor, Godolphin. This necessitated a certain revolution of opinion in respect to peace, which Defoe managed cleverly with the excellent device above mentioned. And there was still higher ground which he felt himself entitled to take. The public safety was involved in the stability of the new ministry, such as it was, and he faces the dilemma with boundless pluck and assurance. "Though I don't like the crew, I won't sink the ship. I'll pump, and heave, and haul, and do everything I can, though he that pulls with me were my enemy. The reason is plain. We are all in the ship, and must sink or swim together." These admirable reasonings brought him at last to the calm rectitude of the following conclusion:

It occurred to me instantly as a principle for my conduct that it was not material to me what ministers her Majesty was pleased to employ. My duty was to go along with every ministry so far as they did not break in upon the constitution and the laws and liberties of my country, my

part being only the duty of a subject, viz., to submit to all lawful commands, and to enter into no service that was not justifiable by the laws, to all of which I have exactly obliged myself.

When Harley returned to power, another modification became necessary, but Defoe piously felt it was providential that he should thus be thrown back upon his original protector. And had the matter ended here, as was long supposed, it is difficult to see what indictment could be brought against him. It is not expedient, certainly, that a director of public opinion should have state pay, and does not look well when the secret is betrayed; but so long as the scope of all his productions is good, honest, and patriotic, with only as much submission in trifles as is inevitable, the bargain is a personal meanness rather than a public crime. And this was long supposed to have been the case. It was believed that after the death of Queen Anne and Harley's final fall, Defoe's eloquent mouth was closed, and that he disappeared into the calm of private life to earn a better hire and a more lasting influence through the two immortal works of fiction by which alone, but for the painful labors of biographers, his name would have been known.

An unwary or else too painstaking student, some twenty years ago, was seized with the idea of roaming the earth in search of relics of Defoe. And the diabolical powers which put this fatal pursuit into his mind directed him to a bundle of yellow papers in the State Paper Office which has, alas! for ever and ever made an end of our man of genius. These treacherous papers give us information, under his own hand, that he was in reality in full action in the most traitorous of employments during the period of his supposed retirement. The following, which is the first of these fatally self-elucidatory letters, will reveal at once the inconceivable occupation to which Defoe in his downfall lent himself. The letter is addressed to the secretary of the minister who had given him his disgraceful office.

It was proposed by my Lord Townshend that I should appear as if I were as before under the displeasure of the Government and separated from the Whigs, and that I might be more serviceable in a kind of disguise than if I appeared openly. . . . In the interval of this, Dyer, the "News-Letter" writer, having been dead, and Dormer, his successor, being unable by his troubles to carry on that work, I had an offer of a share in the property, as well as in the management of that work.

I immediately acquainted my Lord Townshend of it, who, by Mr. Buckley, let me know it would be a very acceptable piece of service, for that letter was really very prejudicial to the public, and the



ENGRAVED BY JOHN P. DAVIS, AFTER ORIGINAL PAINTING BY SIR GODFREY KNELLER, IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM.

ROBERT HARLEY, EARL OF OXFORD.

most difficult to come at in a judicial way in case of offense given. My lord was pleased to add, by Mr. Buckley, that he would consider my service in that case, as he afterward did.

Upon this I engaged in it, and that so far, that though the property was not wholly my own, yet the conduct and government of the style of news was so entirely in me, that I ventured to assure his lordship the sting of that mischievous paper should be entirely taken out, though it was granted that the style should continue Tory as it was, that the party might be amused and not set up another, which would have destroyed the design, and this part I therefore take entirely on myself still.

This went on for a year before my Lord

Townshend went out of the office, and his lordship, in consideration of the service, made me the appointment which Mr. Buckley knows of, with promise of a further allowance as service presented.

My Lord Sunderland, to whose goodness I had many years ago been obliged, when I was in a secret commission sent to Scotland, was pleased to approve and continue this service, and the appointment annexed, and with his lordship's approbation I introduced myself, in the disguise of a translator of the foreign news, to be so far concerned in this weekly paper of *Mist's* as to be able to keep it within the circle of a secret management, also prevent the mischievous part of it; and yet neither *Mist* nor any of those con-

cerned with him have the least guess or suspicion by whose direction I do it.

There is nothing, it seems to us, for any apologist to say in explanation of this extraordinary statement. The emissary of a Whig and Hanoverian government acting as editor of a Tory and Jacobite newspaper,—nay, of three newspapers,—in order to take the harm out of them, to amuse the Tory party with a pretense of style and subjects suitable to their views, while balking all their purposes, is at once the most ingenious and the most shameless of all devices. It continued for a long period, and was very successful. But when the deceit was discovered at last, Mist, the deluded publisher, made a murderous assault upon the deceiver, and the journalists of the period seem to have risen unanimously against him. That Defoe must have fallen sadly before he came to this is very evident, but how he fell except by the natural vengeance of deterioration which makes a man who has long paltered with the truth unable at last to distinguish the gradations which separate the doubtful from the criminal, no one can say. He must, however, have fallen indeed in position and importance before he could be put to such miserable work; and he must have fallen more fatally, like that other son of the morning, deep down into hades, where he became the father of lies and betrayer of mankind, before he could have been capable of this infamous mission.

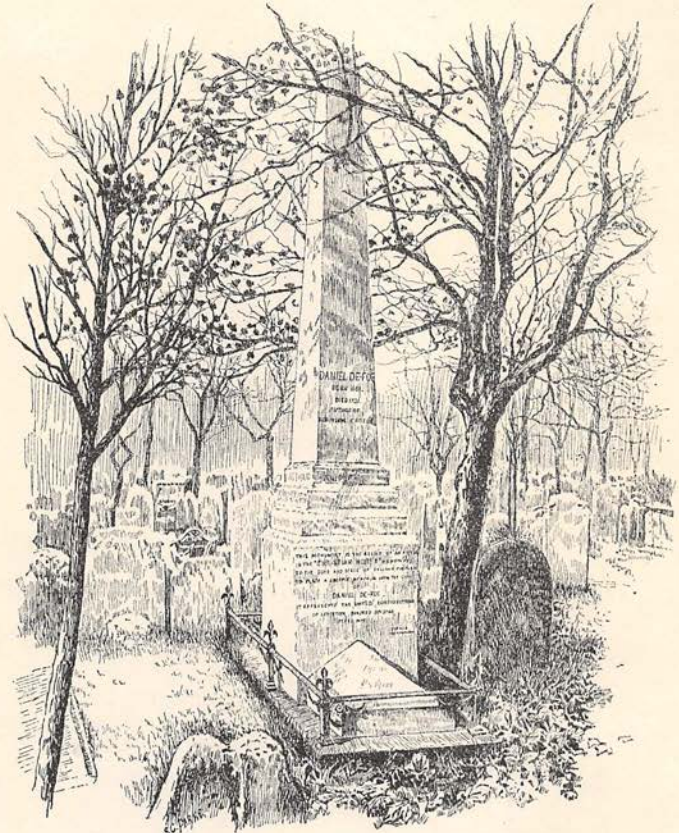
We turn with relief to the work which of all these manifold labors is the only portion which has really survived the effects of time. Defoe's political writings, with all their lucidity, their brilliant good sense and daring satire, and their astonishing readiness and variety, are for the student, and retain a place among the materials of history, studied no longer for their own sake, but for the elucidations they may give. But "Robinson Crusoe" lives by his own right, and will, we may confidently affirm, after the long trial he has had, never die. We need not discuss the other works of fiction which are all as characteristic, as distinct narratives of

apparent fact, as carefully elaborated in every detail; they are almost all excellent in their beginning, but, a fault which is shared by Crusoe himself, run into such a prodigality of detail toward their close, that the absence of dramatic construction and of any real inspiration of art becomes painfully (or, rather, tediously, which is worse) apparent. We do not, however, share the opinion of those critics who disparage Defoe's marvelous power of narrative. "The little art he is truly master of, of forging a story and imposing it on the world for truth," is an art which he possesses in common with but very few men who have ever lived, and even among these few he has it in a very high degree. The gift is peculiar. We are not moved by it to pity or tenderness, and not much to admiration, for the hero. The inner circle of our emotions is seldom if ever entered; but on the other hand, there is nothing in that island where the shipwrecked mariner finds a shelter, and which he makes into a home, which we do not know and see as well as if we had dwelt in it like Robinson. It is an island which is added to the geography of the world. Not only would no child ever doubt its existence, but to the most experienced reader it is far more true and real than half of those of which we have authentic histories, which our relatives and countrymen have visited and colonized. Those South Sea Islands about which we have so many flowery volumes are not half so certain. And every detail of the life of its solitary inhabitant comes up before us like our own personal proceedings, more than visible, incontestable experiences. Not one of us but could draw the picture of the solitary in his furs, with all his odd implements about him; and more wonderful still, not a child from four upward but could tell whom the picture represented. The tale does not move us as do imaginative histories on a more poetic level, but in its humbler range it is as living as the best, and there is something in this very absence of emotion which gives a still more wonderful force to the tale. Men in such desperate circumstances, driven

*I have sometime ago summed up the
series of my life in this distich:—
Woman has tasted differing fortunes more,
And thirteen times have been rich and poor.
Defoe.*

to the use of all their faculties for the mere preservation of their lives, have presumably but little time for feeling. The absorption of every faculty in this one primitive need brings a certain serenity, a calm which is like the hush of the solitude, the silence of the seas. The atmosphere is full of this stillness. There is the repose of nature, not filled with reflections of human sentiment, but imposing her patience, her calm repetition of endless endeavor, upon the solitary flung into her bosom; and there is a sobriety in the story which adds immensely to the power. Other unknown islands have been in fiction, but none where the progress of events was so gradual, where there were so few miraculous accessories. One of the most able of English romancers, the late Charles Reade, is one of the latest to carry us to a desolate island. His story is full of charm, of humor, and of sentiment far beyond the reach of Defoe. Nothing could be more tender, more delightful, than the idyl of the two lovers cut off from all mankind, lost in the silence of the seas. But in every way his isle is an enchanted isle. Not only is it peopled with love and all the graces, but it is running over with every convenience, everything that is useful and beautiful. The inexhaustible ingenuity of the lover is not more remarkable than the quantities of necessary articles of every kind that turn up at every step. He builds his lady a bower lined with mother-of-pearl; he clothes her in a cloak of sealskin; he finds jewels for her; she has but to wish and to have, as if Regent street had been within reach. Very different is the sober sanity of the elder narrative. Conveniences come very slowly to Robinson Crusoe. He has to grope his way, and find his living hardly, patiently. Day after day and year after year, the story-teller goes on working out the order of events. It is as leisurely as nature, as little helped by accident, as sober, even as matter of fact; and yet what a potent, clear, all-realizing fancy this sober imagination was!

He was fifty-eight at the time this book was written, a man worn with endless work and

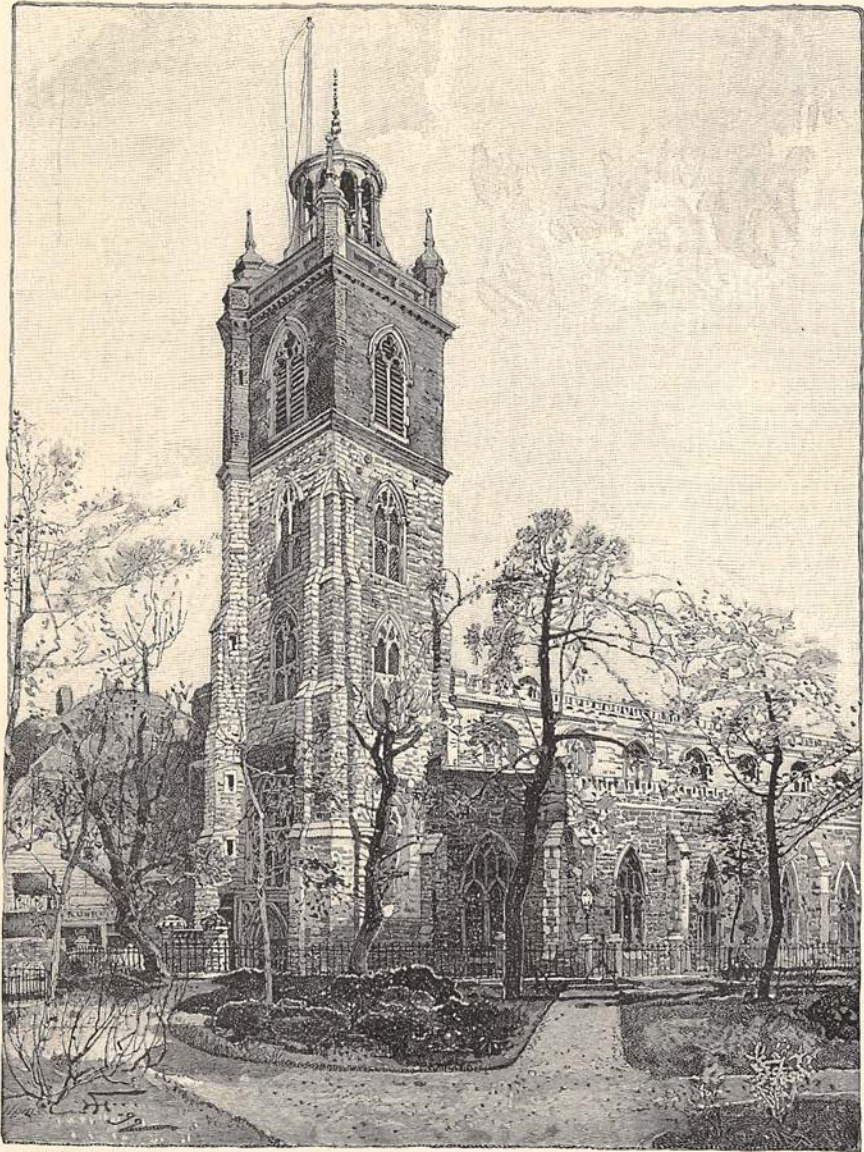


DRAWN BY S. G. PARKE.

MONUMENT TO DEFOE AT BUNHILL FIELDS.

strife, but ever ready for more; a man who had fallen and failed, and made but little of his life. It is said that he was at his highest point of external prosperity when he published "Robinson Crusoe"; but when we remember that he was at that time engaged in the inconceivable muddle of *Mist's* journal, it seems almost impossible to believe this, or to understand how anything but poverty could have driven him into such disgraceful employment. No doubt, to a man who at heart had once been an honest man, and was so no more, it must have been a relief and blessed deliverance to escape away into the distant seas, to refresh his ever-active soul with the ingenious devices of the shipwrecked sailor, and to bury himself in that life so different from his own. Was it a desperate expedient of nature to save him from utter self-contempt? Such a man, even if his conscience had grown callous, must have required some outlet from the dreadful slavery to which he had bound himself.

"Robinson Crusoe" is the work by which Defoe is best known, which is, after all, the most effectual guarantee that it is his best work. But it is not, to our thinking, worthy of being



DRAWN BY HARRY FENN.

ENGRAVED BY H. E. SYLVESTER.

CHURCH OF ST. GILES, CRIPPLEGATE, WHERE DEFOE IS SUPPOSED TO HAVE BEEN BAPTIZED.

placed in competition with the "Journal of the Plague," a history so real, so solemn, and so impressive, so full of the atmosphere and sentiment of the time, that it reaches a far higher point of literary art than anything else Defoe has written. For this is not prose alone, nor that art of making fiction look like truth, which is supposed to be his greatest excellence: it is one of the most impressive pictures of a historical incident which has struck the poetic imagination everywhere, and of which we have perhaps more authentic records than of any other historical episode. Neither Boccaccio nor Manzoni has equaled Defoe in the story of

the plague. To the old Italian it was a horror from which the life-loving fled with loathing as well as fear, and which they tried to forget and put out of their sight. Defoe's minute description of the argument carried on within his own mind by the narrator is curiously characteristic of the tendency to elaborate and explain which enters so largely into all his works. The mental condition of the respectable citizen, divided between concern for his life and concern for his property, seeing with reasonable eyes that death was not certain, but that in case of flight ruin was, is in his best manner, and so real that it is impossible to resist its air of

absolute truthfulness. But the state of the shut-up streets, the dreadful sounds and sights, the brooding heat and stillness of the long and awful days, the cloud of fate that is about the doomed city, are beyond description impressive. This curious spectator of all things, this impartial yet eager looker-on, determined to see all that can be seen, prudent yet fearless, adopting every precaution, yet neglecting no means of investigation, inquiring everywhere, always with his eyes and his ears open, at once a philosophical inquirer and an eager gossip, is without doubt Defoe himself. But he is also a marked figure of the time. He is one of the special kind of men born to illustrate that period. Pepys would have found means for some piece of junketing even in the midst of his alarm, whereas Defoe thinks of his property, when he has time to think of anything but the plague, which is a very natural modification consequent on the changes of the times. But they are at bottom the same. While, however, this central figure remains the characteristic but not elevated personage with whom we are already acquainted, the history which he records is done with a tragic force and completeness which it is impossible to surpass. In this there is nothing commonplace, no wearing monotony; the very statistics have a tragic solemnity in them; the awful, unseen presence dominates everything. We scarcely breathe while we move about the streets emptied of all passers-by, or with a suspicious throng in the middle of the way, keeping as far as possible from the houses. This is not mere prose: it is poetry in its most rare form; it is an ideal representation, in all its sober details, of one of the most tragical moments of human suffering and fate.

Nothing else that Defoe has done is on the same level. It is pitched on too high a key, perhaps, for the multitude. His innocent thief, Colonel Jack, begins with a picture both amusing and touching of the curious moral denseness and confusion of a street boy; his Cavalier is a charming young man. But both these and all the rest of Defoe's heroes and heroines grow heavy and tedious at the end. The "Journal of the Plague" is not like them in this respect. The conclusion—the sudden surprise and delicious sense of relief, the joy which makes the passers-by stop and shake hands with one another in the streets, and the women call out from their windows with tears and outcries of gladness—is as sudden and overwhelming as the reality. We are caught in the growing despair, and suddenly deliverance comes. Here alone Defoe is not too

long, the unexpected is brought in with a skill and force not less remarkable than that which in the previous pages has portrayed the slow growth and inevitable development of the misery. Up to this anticlimax of unlooked-for joy the calamity has grown, every new touch intensifying the awful reality. But the recovery is sudden, and told without an unnecessary word. It is the only instance in which Defoe has followed the instinct of a great artist, and shown that he knew how to avail himself of the unwritten code and infallible methods of art.

We forget his shortcomings when we discuss this which is to our mind much his greatest work, and it is well that we should leave him in this disposition. He died mysteriously, alone, after a period of wandering and hiding which nobody can explain. Whether he was in trouble with creditors or with political enemies, or with the exasperated party which he had managed to outwit; whether he kept out of the way that his family might make better terms for themselves, or that he might keep the remains of his money out of the hands of an undutiful son or a grasping son-in-law, nobody can tell. He died in remote lodgings, all alone, and his affairs were administered by a stranger. His domestic circumstances have been referred to during his life only in the vaguest way. He had a wife and a numerous family when he was put in the pillory; he had a wife, a son who was unkind, and three daughters, at the end. He died at seventy-two "of a lethargy," no doubt fallen into the feebleness and hopelessness of lonely old age. To be doing seems to have been a necessity of his being. But he never seems to have enjoyed the importance due to his powers; and in an age when men of letters filled the highest posts, he never rose above his citizen circle, his shopkeeping ways. Something in the man must have accounted for this, but it is difficult to say what it was; for the age did not require a high standard of truthfulness, and the worst of his misdoings were kept secret from the public. Perhaps his manners were not such as society, though very easy in those days, could tolerate; perhaps—but this is simple guess-work. All we know of Defoe is that as a writer he was of the greatest influence and note, but as a man nothing. When Addison was secretary of state, and Prior an ambassador, he was nobody—a sword in the hand of an unscrupulous statesman; a shopkeeper manufacturing his genius and selling it by the yard. A sadder conclusion never was told.

M. O. W. Oliphant.