

## **BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS.**

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# BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS.

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BY SIR WALTER SCOTT.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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## BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS.

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DANIEL DE FOE.

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This biographical sketch was not written by the author of these volumes, but by the late Mr John Ballantyne, bookseller in Edinburgh; whose wit, lively talents, and kindness of disposition, will make him long regretted and remembered by his friends.

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PERHAPS there exists no work, either of instruction or entertainment, in the English language, which has been more generally read, and more universally admired, than the *Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*. It is difficult to say in what the charm consists, by which persons of all classes and denominations are thus fascinated; yet the majority of readers will recollect it as among the first works which awakened and interested their youthful atten-

tion; and feel, even in advanced life, and in the maturity of their understanding, that there are still associated with Robinson Crusoe, the sentiments peculiar to that period, when all is new, all glittering in prospect, and when those visions are most bright, which the experience of after life tends only to darken and destroy.

This work was first published in April, 1719; its reception, as may be supposed, was universal. It is a singular circumstance that the author (the subject of our present Memoir), after a life spent in political turmoil, danger, and imprisonment, should have occupied himself, in its decline, in the production of a work like the present; unless it may be supposed, that his wearied heart turned with disgust from society and its institutions, and found solace in picturing the happiness of a state such as he has assigned to his hero. Be this as it may, society is for ever indebted to the memory of De Foe for his production of a work, in which the ways of Providence are simply and pleasingly vindicated, and a lasting and useful moral is conveyed through the channel of an interesting and delightful story.

Daniel De Foe was born in London in the year 1663. His father was James Foe, of the parish of St Giles, butcher. Much curious speculation, with which we shall not trouble our readers, has arisen from the circum-



stance of Daniel's having, in his own instance, prefixed the *De* to the family name. We are inclined to adopt the opinion of that critical inquirer, who supposes that Daniel did so, being ashamed of the lowness of his origin, and conceived the prefixed *De* had a sound of Norman dignity with it. His family, as well as himself, were dissenters; but it does not appear that his tenets were so strict as his sect required; for he complains, in the Preface to his *More Reformation*, that some dissenters had reproached him, as if he had said, that « the gallows and the galleys ought to be the penalty of going to the conventicle; forgetting that I must design to have my father, my wife, six innocent children, and myself, put into the same condition.»

De Foe's education was rather circumscribed, which is the more to be lamented, as, in so many instances, he has exhibited proofs of rare natural genius. He was sent by his father, at twelve years old, to the Newington Green Dissenting Academy, then kept by Mr Morton, where he remained about four years; and this appears to have been all the education he ever received. When he was remanded from school, it would seem that, his genius not lying towards the marrow-bone and cleaver, his father had put him to some other trade; of what nature we are unable to learn, De Foe

himself being very reserved on the subject. When charged by Tutchin<sup>1</sup> with having his breeding as an apprentice to a hosier, he asserts (May 1705), "that he never was a hosier,<sup>2</sup> or an apprentice, but admits that he had been a trader."

This, however, had occupied but a short period of his youth; for in 1685, when he was in his twenty-second year, he took up arms in the cause of the Duke of Monmouth. On the destruction of Monmouth's party, Daniel had the good fortune to escape unpunished amidst the herd of greater delinquents; but, in his latter years, when the avowal was no longer dangerous, he boasts himself much of his exploits, in his *Appeal to Honour and Justice, being a true Account of his Conduct in Public Affairs*.

Three years afterwards (1688), De Foe was admitted a liveryman of London. As he had been throughout a steady advocate for the Revolution, he had now the satisfaction of witnessing that great event. Oldmixon says (*Works*, vol. ii, p. 276), that at a feast, given by the Lord Mayor of London to King William, on the 29th October, 1689, De Foe appeared

<sup>1</sup> Tutchin, the publisher of the *Observer*, and a steady opponent of De Foe's, both in politics and literature.

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the salvo he laid to his conscience for this apparently false assertion, was, that though he *dealt* in hose, he did not *make* them.

gallantly mounted and richly accoutred, among the troopers commanded by Lord Peterborough, who attended the King and Queen from Whitehall to the Mansion House. All Daniel's horsemanship, however, united to the steady devotion of his pen to the cause of William, were unable to procure him the notice of that cold-charactered monarch ; and our author was fain to content himself (as his adversary Tutchin asserts) with the humble occupation of a hosier in Freeman's-yard, Cornhill : wisely considering that, if the court could do without political tracts, the people could not do without stockings.

With the ill fortune, however, attendant upon those men of genius, who cultivate their superior powers to the neglect of that common sense which is requisite to carry a man creditably through this every-day world, De Foe's affairs declined from bad to worse ; he spent those hours which he ought to have devoted to his shop, in a society for the cultivation of polite learning, and he was under the necessity of absconding from his creditors in 1692. One of those creditors, who had less consideration for polite learning, and more irritability than the rest, took out a commission of bankruptcy against him ; but, fortunately for our author, this was superseded on the petition of those to whom he was most indebted, and a composition was accepted. This composition he

punctually paid by efforts of unwearied diligence ; — and some of the creditors, whose claims had been thus satisfied, falling into distress themselves, he waited upon them, and paid their debts in full. He was next engaged in carrying on tile-works, on the banks of the Thames, near Tilbury, but with little success ; for it was sarcastically said of him that he did not, « like the Egyptians, require bricks without straw, but, like the Jews, required bricks without paying his labourers.» United to his tile-making, our author, stimulated by an active mind and embarrassed circumstances, devised many other schemes, or, as he called them, projects. He wrote many sheets about the English coin; he projected Banks for every county, and Factories for goods; he exhibited a Proposal (very feelingly, no doubt) for a commission of inquiry into bankrupts' estates; he contrived a Pension-office for the relief of the poor, and finished by publishing a long Essay upon projects themselves.

About this period (1695), our author's indefatigable endeavours procured him some notice from the court, and he was appointed accountant to the commissioners for managing the duties on glass. Here, also, his usual ill luck attended him; he was thrown out of his situation by the suppression of the tax in 1699.

But the time at length arrived when the sun

of royal favour was to shine out upon our author's prospects. About the end of 1699, there was published, what De Foe calls, "an horrid pamphlet, in very ill verse, written by one Tutchin, and called *The Foreigners* : in which the author fell personally upon the King, then upon the Dutch nation, and, after having reproached his majesty with crimes, that his worst enemies could not think of without horror, he sums up all in the odious name of *Foreigner*. This filled me with rage against the book, and gave birth to a trifle, which I never could hope should have met with so general an acceptance."

The trifle, which De Foe here alludes to, was his *True-born Englishman*: a poetical satire on *The Foreigners*, and a defence of King William and the Dutch; of which the sale was great without example, and our author's reward proportionate. He was even admitted to the honour of a personal interview with the king, and became with more ardour than ever a professed partisan of the court. In this composition the satire was strong, powerful, and manly,—upbraiding the English Tories for their unreasonable prejudice against foreigners; the rather that there were so many nations blended in the mass now called Englishmen. The verse was rough and mistuned, for De Foe never seems to have possessed an ear for the melody of language, whether in prose or

verse. But though wanting the long resounding verse and energy divine of Dryden, he had often masculine expressions and happy turns of thought, not unworthy of the author of *Absalom and Achitophel*,—though upon the whole, his style seems rather to have been formed on that of Hall, Oldham, and the elder satirists. The first verses are well known :

Wherever God erects a House of prayer,  
The Devil always builds a chapel there ;  
And 't will be found, upon examination,  
The latter has the largest congregation.

The author's first publication after *The True-born Englishman* was, *The original Power of the Collective Body of the People of England examined and asserted* ; next, *An Argument to prove that a Standing Army, with consent of Parliament, was not inconsistent with a free Government* ; but, as we do not mean to follow De Foe through the career of his politics, and intend only to notice such works as, in their consequences, materially affected his personal situation and affairs, we shall pass to the death of his sovereign and patron, which took place 8th March, 1702.

The accession of Anne having restored the line of Stuart, to whom the politics and conduct of De Foe had been peculiarly obnoxious, our author was shortly reduced, as before, to

live on the produce of his wits : — and it is perhaps lucky for the world that there is so much truth in the universal outcry against the neglect of living authors ; for there seems a certain laziness concomitant with genius, which can only be incited to action by the pressure of necessity. Had William lived, probably the world would never have been delighted with the *Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*.

Whether De Foe found politics the most vendible produce of the press, or, like Macbeth, felt himself

Stept in so far, that should I wade no more,  
Returning were as tedious as go o'er,—

we are yet to learn ; but he ventured to reprint his *Shortest Way with the Dissenters*, and to publish several other treatises, which were considered libellous by the Commons ; and on the 25th of February, 1702-3, a complaint being made in the House, of a book entitled, *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters*, and the folios 11—18 and 26 being read, « Resolved, that this book, being full of false and scandalous reflections on this Parliament, and tending to promote sedition, be burnt by the hands of the common hangman, in New Palace-Yard.»

Our unfortunate author's political sins were