

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

DANIEL DEFOE (1661?-1731)

FROM THE LIFE, ADVENTURES, AND
PIRACIES, OF THE FAMOUS
CAPTAIN SINGLETON

We cruised near two years in those seas, chiefly upon the Spaniards; not that we made any difficulty of taking English ships, or Dutch, or French, if they came in our way; and particularly, Captain Wilmot attacked a New England ship bound from the Madeiras to Jamaica, and another bound from New York to Barbados, with provisions; which last was a very happy supply to us. But the reason why we meddled as little with English vessels as we could, was, first, because, if they were ships of any force, we were sure of more resistance from them; and, secondly, because we found the English ships had less booty when taken, for the Spaniards generally had money on board, and that was what we best knew what to do with. Captain Wilmot was, indeed, more particularly cruel when he took any English vessel, that they might not too soon have advice of him in England; and so the men-of-war have orders to look out for him. But this part I bury in silence for the present.

We increased our stock in these two years considerably, having taken 60,000 pieces of eight in one vessel, and 100,000 in another; and being thus first grown rich, we resolved to be strong too, for we had taken a brigantine built at Virginia, an excellent sea-boat, and a good sailer, and able to carry twelve guns; and a large Spanish frigate-built ship, that sailed incomparably well also, and which afterwards, by the help of good carpenters, we fitted up to carry twenty-eight guns. And now we wanted more hands, so we put away for the Bay of Campeachy, not doubting we should ship as many men there as we pleased; and so we did.

Here we sold the sloop that I was in; and Captain Wilmot keeping his own ship, I took the command of the Spanish frigate as captain, and my comrade Harris as eldest lieutenant, and a bold enterprising fellow he was, as any the world afforded. One culverdine was put

into the brigantine, so that we were now three stout ships, well manned, and victualled for twelve months; for we had taken two or three sloops from New England and New York, laden with flour, peas, and barrelled beef and pork, going for Jamaica and Barbados; and for more beef we went on shore on the island of Cuba, where we killed as many black cattle as we pleased, though we had very little salt to cure them.

Out of all the prizes we took here we took their powder and bullet, their small-arms and cutlasses; and as for their men, we always took the surgeon and the carpenter, as persons who were of particular use to us upon many occasions; nor were they always unwilling to go with us, though for their own security, in case of accidents, they might easily pretend they were carried away by force; of which I shall give a pleasant account in the course of my other expeditions.

We had one very merry fellow here, a Quaker, whose name was William Walters, whom we took out of a sloop bound from Pennsylvania to Barbados. He was a surgeon, and they called him doctor; but he was not employed in the sloop as a surgeon, but was going to Barbados to get a berth, as the sailors call it. However, he had all his surgeon's chests on board, and we made him go with us, and take all his implements with him. He was a comic fellow indeed, a man of very good solid sense, and an excellent surgeon; but, what was worth all, very good-humoured and pleasant in his conversation, and a bold, stout, brave fellow too, as any we had among us.

I found William, as I thought, not very averse to go along with us, and yet resolved to do it so that it might be apparent he was taken away by force, and to this purpose he comes to me. "Friend," says he, "thou sayest I must go with thee, and it is not in my power to resist thee if I would; but I desire thou wilt oblige the master of the sloop which I am on board to certify under his hand, that I was taken away by force and against my will." And this he said with so much satisfaction in his face, that

I could not but understand him. "Ay, ay," says I, "whether it be against your will or no, I'll make him and all the men give you a certificate of it, or I'll take them all along with us, and keep them till they do." So I drew up a certificate myself, wherein I wrote that he was taken away by main force, as a prisoner, by a pirate ship; that they carried away his chest and instruments first, and then bound his hands behind him and forced him into their boat; and this was signed by the master and all his men.

Accordingly I fell a-swearing at him, and called to my men to tie his hands behind him, and so we put him into our boat and carried him away. When I had him on board, I called him to me. "Now, friend," says I, "I have brought you away by force, it is true, but I am not of the opinion I have brought you away so much against your will as they imagine. Come," says I, "you will be a useful man to us, and you shall have very good usage among us." So I unbound his hands, and first ordered all things that belonged to him to be restored to him, and our captain gave him a dram.

"Thou hast dealt friendly by me," says he, "and I will be plain with thee, whether I came willingly to thee or not. I shall make myself as useful to thee as I can, but thou knowest it is not my business to meddle when thou art to fight." "No, no," says the captain, "but you may meddle a little when we share the money." "Those things are useful to furnish a surgeon's chest," says William, and smiled, "but I shall be moderate."

In short, William was a most agreeable companion; but he had the better of us in this part, that if we were taken we were sure to be hanged, and he was sure to escape; and he knew it well enough. But, in short, he was a sprightly fellow, and fitter to be captain than any of us. I shall have often an occasion to speak of him in the rest of the story.

Our cruising so long in these seas began now to be so well known, that not in England only, but in France and Spain, accounts had been made public of our adventures, and many stories told how we murdered the people in cold blood, tying them back to back, and throwing them into the sea; one-half of which, however, was not true, though more was done than is fit to speak of here.

The consequence of this, however, was, that several English men-of-war were sent to the West Indies, and were particularly instructed to cruise in the Bay of Mexico, and the Gulf

of Florida, and among the Bahama Islands, if possible, to attack us. We were not so ignorant of things as not to expect this, after so long a stay in that part of the world; but the first certain account we had of them was at Honduras, when a vessel coming in from Jamaica told us that two English men-of-war were coming directly from Jamaica thither in quest of us. We were indeed as it were embayed, and could not have made the least shift to have got off, if they had come directly to us; but, as it happened, somebody had informed them that we were in the Bay of Campeachy, and they went directly thither, by which we were not only free of them, but were so much to the windward of them, that they could not make any attempt upon us, though they had known we were there.

We took this advantage, and stood away for Carthagena, and from thence with great difficulty beat it up at a distance from under the shore for St. Martha, till we came to the Dutch island of Curaçoa, and from thence to the island of Tobago, which, as before, was our rendezvous; which, being a deserted, uninhabited island, we at the same time made use of for a retreat. Here the captain of the brigantine died, and Captain Harris, at that time my lieutenant, took the command of the brigantine.

Here we came to a resolution to go away to the coast of Brazil, and from thence to the Cape of Good Hope, and so for the East Indies; but Captain Harris, as I have said, being now captain of the brigantine, alleged that his ship was too small for so long a voyage, but that, if Captain Wilmot would consent, he would take the hazard of another cruise, and he would follow us in the first ship he could take. So we appointed our rendezvous to be at Madagascar, which was done by my recommendation of the place, and the plenty of provisions to be had there.

Accordingly, he went away from us in an evil hour; for, instead of taking a ship to follow us, he was taken, as I heard afterwards, by an English man-of-war, and being laid in irons, died of mere grief and anger before he came to England. His lieutenant, I have heard, was afterwards executed in England for a pirate; and this was the end of the man who first brought me into this unhappy trade.

We parted from Tobago three days after, bending our course for the coast of Brazil, but had not been at sea above twenty-four hours, when we were separated by a terrible storm, which held three days, with very little

abatement or intermission. In this juncture Captain Wilmot happened, unluckily, to be on board my ship, to his great mortification; for we not only lost sight of his ship, but never saw her more till we came to Madagascar, where she was cast away. In short, after having in this tempest lost our fore-topmast, we were forced to put back to the isle of Tobago for shelter, and to repair our damage, which brought us all very near our destruction.

We were no sooner on shore here, and all very busy looking out for a piece of timber for a topmast, but we perceived standing in for the shore an English man-of-war of thirty-six guns. It was a great surprise to us indeed, because we were disabled so much; but, to our great good fortune, we lay pretty snug and close among the high rocks, and the man-of-war did not see us, but stood off again upon his cruise. So we only observed which way she went, and at night, leaving our work, resolved to stand off to sea, steering the contrary way from that which we observed she went; and this, we found, had the desired success, for we saw him no more. We had gotten an bold mizzen-topmast on board, which made us a jury fore-topmast for the present; and so we stood away for the isle of Trinidad, where, though there were Spaniards on shore, yet we landed some men with our boat, and cut a very good piece of fir to make us a new topmast, which we got fitted up effectually; and also we got some cattle here to eke out our provisions; and calling a council of war among ourselves, we resolved to quit those seas for the present, and steer away for the coast of Brazil.

The first thing we attempted here was only getting fresh water, but we learned that there lay the Portuguese fleet at the bay of All Saints, bound for Lisbon, ready to sail, and only waited for a fair wind. This made us lie by, wishing to see them put to sea, and, accordingly as they were with or without convoy, to attack or avoid them.

It sprung up a fresh gale in the evening at S.W. by W., which, being fair for the Portugal fleet, and the weather pleasant and agreeable, we heard the signal given to unmoor, and running in under the island of Si, we hauled our mainsail and foresail up in the brails, lowered the topsail upon the cap, and clewed them up, that we might lie as snug as we could, expecting their coming out, and the next morning saw the whole fleet come out accordingly, but not at all to our satisfaction, for they consisted of twenty-six sail, and most of them ships

of force, as well as burthen, both merchantmen and men-of-war; so, seeing there was no meddling, we lay still where we were also, till the fleet was out of sight, and then stood off and on, in hopes of meeting with further purchase.

It was not long before we saw a sail, and immediately gave her chase; but she proved an excellent sailer, and, standing out to sea, we saw plainly she trusted to her heels—that is to say, to her sails. However, as we were a clean ship, we gained upon her, though slowly, and had we had a day before us, we should certainly have come up with her; but it grew dark apace, and in that case we knew we should lose sight of her.

Our merry Quaker, perceiving us to crowd still after her in the dark, wherein we could not see which way she went, came very dryly to me. "Friend Singleton," says he, "dost thee know what we are a-doing?" Says I, "Yes; why, we are chasing yon ship, are we not?" "And how dost thou know that?" said he, very gravely still. "Nay, that's true," says I again; "we cannot be sure." "Yes, friend," says he, "I think we may be sure that we are running away from her, not chasing her. I am afraid," adds he, "thou art turned Quaker, and hast resolved not to use the hand of power, or art a coward, and art flying from thy enemy."

"What do you mean?" says I (I think I swore at him). "What do you sneer at now? You have always one dry rub or another to give us."

"Nay," says he, "it is plain enough the ship stood off to sea due east, on purpose to lose us, and thou mayest be sure her business does not lie that way; for what should she do at the coast of Africa in this latitude, which should be as far south as Congo or Angola? But as soon as it is dark, that we would lose sight of her, she will tack and stand away west again for the Brazil coast and for the bay, where thou knowest she was going before; and are we not, then, running away from her? I am greatly in hopes, friend," says the dry, gibing creature, "thou wilt turn Quaker, for I see thou art not for fighting."

"Very well, William," says I; "then I shall make an excellent pirate." However, William was in the right, and I apprehended what he meant immediately; and Captain Wilmot, who lay very sick in his cabin, overhearing us, understood him as well as I, and called out to me that William was right, and it was our best way to change our course, and stand away for

the bay, where it was ten to one but we should snap her in the morning.

Accordingly we went about-ship, got our larboard tacks on board, set the top-gallant sails, and crowded for the bay of All Saints, where we came to an anchor early in the morning, just out of gunshot of the forts; we furled our sails with rope-yarns, that we might haul home the sheets without going up to loose them, and, lowering our main and foreyards, looked just as if we had lain there a good while.

In two hours afterwards we saw our game standing in for the bay with all the sail she could make, and she came innocently into our very mouths, for we lay still till we saw her almost within gunshot, when, our foremost gears being stretched fore and aft, we first ran up our yards, and then hauled home the topsail sheets, the rope-yarns that furled them giving way of themselves; the sails were set in a few minutes; at the same time slipping our cable, we came upon her before she could get under way upon the other tack. They were so surprised that they made little or no resistance, but struck after the first broadside.

We were considering what to do with her, when William came to me. "Hark thee, friend," says he, "thou hast made a fine piece of work of it now, hast thou not, to borrow thy neighbour's ship here just at thy neighbour's door, and never ask him leave? Now, dost thou not think there are some men-of-war in the port? Thou hast given them the alarm sufficiently; thou wilt have them upon thy back before night, depend upon it; to ask thee wherefore thou didst so."

"Truly, William," said I, "for aught I know, that may be true; what, then, shall we do next?" Says he, "Thou hast but two things to do; either to go in and take all the rest, or else get thee gone before they come out and take thee; for I see they are hoisting a topmast to yon great ship, in order to put to sea immediately, and they won't be long before they come to talk with thee, and what wilt thou say to them when they ask thee why thou borrowedst their ship without leave?"

As William said, so it was. We could see by our glasses they were all in a hurry, manning and fitting some sloops they had there, and a large man-of-war, and it was plain they would soon be with us. But we were not at a loss what to do; we found the ship we had taken was laden with nothing considerable for our purpose, except some cocoa, some sugar, and twenty barrels of flour; the rest of her cargo was hides; so

we took out all we thought fit for our turn, and, among the rest, all her ammunition, great shot, and small arms, and turned her off. We also took a cable and three anchors she had, which were for our purpose, and some of her sails. She had enough left just to carry her into port, and that was all.

Having done this, we stood on upon the Brazil coast, southward, till we came to the mouth of the river Janeiro. But as we had two days the wind blowing hard at S.E. and S.S.E., we were obliged to come to an anchor under a little island, and wait for a wind. In this time the Portuguese had, it seems, given notice over land to the governor there, that a pirate was upon the coast; so that, when we came in view of the port, we saw two men-of-war riding just without the bar, whereof one, we found, was getting under sail with all possible speed, having slipped her cable on purpose to speak with us; the other was not so forward, but was preparing to follow. In less than an hour they stood both fair after us, with all the sail they could make.

Had not the night come on, William's words had been made good; they would certainly have asked us the question what we did there, for we found the foremost ship gained upon us, especially upon one tack, for we plied away from them to windward; but in the dark losing sight of them, we resolved to change our course and stand away directly for sea, not doubting that we should lose them in the night.

Whether the Portuguese commander guessed we would do so or no, I know not; but in the morning, when the daylight appeared, instead of having lost him, we found him in chase of us about a league astern; only, to our great good fortune, we could see but one of the two. However, this one was a great ship, carried six-and-forty guns, and an admirable sailer, as appeared by her outsailing us; for our ship was an excellent sailer too, as I have said before.

When I found this, I easily saw there was no remedy, but we must engage; and as we knew we could expect no quarter from these scoundrels the Portuguese, a nation I had an original aversion to, I let Captain Wilmot know how it was. The captain, sick as he was, jumped up in the cabin, and would be led out upon the deck (for he was very weak) to see how it was. "Well," says he, "we'll fight them!"

Our men were all in good heart before, but to see the captain so brisk, who had lain ill of a calenture ten or eleven days, gave them double courage, and they went all hands to

work to make a clear ship and be ready. William, the Quaker, comes to me with a kind of a smile. "Friend," says he, "what does your ship follow us for?" "Why," says I, "to fight us, you may be sure." "Well," says he, "and will he come up with us, dost thou think?" "Yes," said I, "you see she will." "Why, then, friend," says the dry wretch, "why dost thou run from her still, when thou seest she will overtake thee? Will it be better for us to be overtaken farther off than here?" "Much as one for that," says I; "why, what would you have us do?" "Do!" says he; "let us not give the poor man more trouble than needs must; let us stay for him and hear what he has to say to us." "He will talk to us in powder and ball," said I. "Very well, then," says he, "if that be his country language, we must talk to him in the same, must we not? or else how shall he understand us?" "Very well, William," says I, "we understand you." And the captain, as ill as he was, called to me, "William's right again," says he: "as good here as a league farther." So he gives a word of command, "Haul up the main-sail; we'll shorten sail for him."

Accordingly we shortened sail, and as we expected her upon our lee-side, we being then upon our starboard tack, brought eighteen of our guns to the larboard side, resolving to give him a broadside that should warm him. It was about half-an-hour before he came up with us, all which time we luffed up, that we might keep the wind of him, by which he was obliged to run up under our lee, as we designed him; when we got him upon our quarter, we edged down, and received the fire of five or six of his guns. By this time you may be sure all our hands were at their quarters, so we clapped our helm hard a-weather, let go the lee-braces of the main-topsail, and laid it a-back and so our ship fell athwart the Portuguese ship's hawse; then we immediately poured in our broadside, raking them fore and aft, and killed them a great many men.

The Portuguese, we could see, were in the utmost confusion; and not being aware of our design, their ship having fresh way, ran their bowsprit into the fore part of our main shrouds, as that they could not easily get clear of us, and so we lay locked after that manner. The enemy could not bring above five or six guns, besides their small arms, to bear upon us, while we played our whole broadside upon him.

In the middle of the heat of this fight, as I was very busy upon the quarter-deck, the cap-

tain calls to me, for he never stirred from us, "What the devil is friend William a-doing yonder?" says the captain; "has he any business upon deck?" I stepped forward, and there was friend William, with two or three stout fellows, lashing the ship's bowsprit fast to our main-masts, for fear they should get away from us; and every now and then he pulled a bottle out of his pocket, and gave the men a dram to encourage them. The shot flew about his ears as thick as may be supposed in such an action, where the Portuguese, to give them their due, fought very briskly, believing at first they were sure of their game, and trusting to their superiority; but there was William, as composed, and in as perfect tranquillity as to danger, as if he had been over a bowl of punch, only very busy securing the matter, that a ship of forty-six guns should not run away from a ship of eight-and-twenty.

This work was too hot to hold long; our men behaved bravely: our gunner, a gallant man, shouted below, pouring in his shot at such a rate, that the Portuguese began to slacken their fire; we had dismounted several of their guns by firing in at their fore-castle, and raking them, as I said, fore and aft. Presently comes William up to me. "Friend," says he, very calmly, "what dost thou mean? Why dost thou not visit thy neighbour in the ship, the door being open for thee?" I understood him immediately, for our guns had so torn their hull, that we had beat two port-holes into one, and the bulk-head of their steerage was split to pieces, so that they could not retire to their close quarters; so I gave the word immediately to board them. Our second lieutenant, with about thirty men, entered in an instant over the fore-castle, followed by some more with the boatswain, and cutting in pieces about twenty-five men that they found upon the deck, and then throwing some grenades into the steerage, they entered there also; upon which the Portuguese cried quarter presently, and we mastered the ship, contrary indeed to our own expectation; for we would have compounded with them if they would have sheered off: but laying them athwart the hawse at first, and following our fire furiously, without giving them any time to get clear of us and work their ship; by this means, though they had six-and-forty guns, they were not able to fight above five or six, as I said above, for we beat them immediately from their guns in the fore-castle, and killed them abundance of men between decks, so that when we

entered they had hardly found men enough to fight us hand to hand upon their deck.

The surprise of joy to hear the Portuguese cry quarter, and see their ancient struck, was so great to our captain, who, as I have said, was reduced very weak with a high fever, that it gave him new life. Nature conquered the distemper, and the fever abated that very night; so that in two or three days he was sensibly better, his strength began to come, and he was able to give his orders effectually in everything that was material, and in about ten days was entirely well and about the ship.

In the meantime I took possession of the Portuguese man-of-war; and Captain Wilmot made me, or rather I made myself, captain of her for the present. About thirty of their seamen took service with us, some of which were French, some Genoese; and we set the rest on shore the next day on a little island on the coast of Brazil, except some wounded men, who were not in a condition to be removed, and whom we were bound to keep on board; but we had an occasion afterwards to dispose of them at the Cape, where, at their own request, we set them on shore.

Captain Wilmot, as soon as the ship was taken, and the prisoners stowed, was for standing in for the river Janeiro again, not doubting but we should meet with the other man-of-war, who, not having been able to find us, and having lost the company of her comrade, would certainly be returned, and might be surprised by the ship we had taken, if we carried Portuguese colours; and our men were all for it.

But our friend William gave us better counsel, for he came to me, "Friend," says he, "I understand the captain is for sailing back to the Rio Janeiro, in hopes to meet with the other ship that was in chase of thee yesterday. Is it true, dost thou intend it?" "Why, yes," says I, "William, pray why not?" "Nay," says he, "thou mayest do so if thou wilt." "Well, I know that too, William," said I, "but the captain is a man will be ruled by reason; what have you to say to it?" "Why," says William gravely, "I only ask what is thy business, and the business of all the people thou hast with thee? Is it not to get money?" "Yes, William, it is so, in our honest way." "And wouldst thou," says he, "rather have money without fighting, or fighting without money? I mean which wouldst thou have by choice, suppose it to be left to thee?" "O William," says I, "the first of the two, to be

sure." "Why, then," says he, "what great gain hast thou made of the prize thou hast taken now, though it has cost the lives of thirteen of thy men, besides some hurt? It is true thou hast got the ship and some prisoners; but thou wouldst have had twice the booty in a merchant-ship, with not one-quarter of the fighting; and how dost thou know either what force or what number of men may be in the other ship, and what loss thou mayest suffer, and what gain it shall be to thee if thou take her? I think, indeed, thou mayest much better let her alone."

"Why, William, it is true," said I, "and I'll go tell the captain what your opinion is, and bring you word what he says." Accordingly in I went to the captain and told him William's reasons; and the captain was of his mind, that our business was indeed fighting when we could not help it, but that our main affair was money, and that with as few blows as we could. So that adventure was laid aside, and we stood along shore again south for the river De la Plata, expecting some purchase thereabouts; especially we had our eyes upon some of the Spanish ships from Buenos Ayres, which are generally very rich in silver, and one such prize would have done our business. We plied about here, in the latitude of — south, for near a month, and nothing offered; and here we began to consult what we should do next, for we had come to no resolution yet. Indeed, my design was always for the Cape de Bona Speranza, and so to the East Indies. I had heard some flaming stories of Captain Avery, and the fine things he had done in the Indies, which were doubled and doubled, even ten thousand fold; and from taking a great prize in the Bay of Bengal, where he took a lady, said to be the Great Mogul's daughter, with a great quantity of jewels about her, we had a story told us, that he took a Mogul ship, so the foolish sailors called it, laden with diamonds.

I would fain have had friend William's advice whither we should go, but he always put it off with some quaking quibble or other. In short, he did not care for directing us neither; whether he made a piece of conscience of it, or whether he did not care to venture having it come against him afterwards or no, this I know not; but we concluded at last without him.

We were, however, pretty long in resolving, and hankered about the Rio de la Plata a long time. At last we spied a sail to windward, and it was such a sail as I believe had not been

seen in that part of the world a great while. It wanted not that we should give it chase, for it stood directly towards us, as well as they that steered could make it; and even that was more accident of weather than anything else, for if the wind had chopped about anywhere they must have gone with it. I leave any man that is a sailor, or understands anything of a ship, to judge what a figure this ship made when we first saw her, and what we could imagine was the matter with her. Her maintop-mast was come by the board about six foot above the cap, and fell forward, the head of the topgallant-mast hanging in the fore-shrouds by the stay; at the same time the parrel of the mizzen-topsail-yard by some accident giving way, the mizzen-topsail-braces (the standing part of which being fast to the main-topsail shrouds) brought the mizzen-topsail, yard and all, down with it, which spread over part of the quarter-deck like an awning; the fore-topsail was hoisted up two-thirds of the mast, but the sheets were flown; the fore-yard was lowered down upon the fore-castle, the sail loose, and part of it hanging overboard. In this manner she came down upon us with the wind quartering. In a word, the figure the whole ship made was the most confounding to men that understood the sea that ever was seen. She had no boat, neither had she any colours out.

When we came near to her, we fired a gun to bring her to. She took no notice of it, nor of us, but came on just as she did before. We fired again, but it was all one. At length we came within pistol-shot of one another, but nobody answered nor appeared; so we began to think that it was a ship gone ashore somewhere in distress, and the men having forsaken her, the high tide had floated her off to sea. Coming nearer to her, we ran up alongside of her so close that we could hear a noise within her, and see the motion of several people through her ports.

Upon this we manned out two boats full of men, and very well armed, and ordered them to board her at the same minute, as near as they could, and to enter one at her fore-chains on the one side, and the other amidships on the other side. As soon as they came to the ship's side, a surprising multitude of black sailors, such as they were, appeared upon deck, and, in short, terrified our men so much that the boat which was to enter her men in the waist stood off again, and durst not board her; and the men that entered out of the other boat,

finding the first boat, as they thought, beaten off, and seeing the ship full of men, jumped all back again into their boat, and put off, not knowing what the matter was. Upon this we prepared to pour in a broadside upon her; but our friend William set us to rights again here; for it seems he guessed how it was sooner than we did, and coming up to me (for it was our ship that came up with her), "Friend," says he, "I am of opinion that thou art wrong in this matter, and thy men have been wrong also in their conduct. I'll tell thee how thou shalt take this ship, without making use of those things called guns." "How can that be, William?" said I. "Why," said he, "thou mayest take her with thy helm; thou seest they keep no steerage, and thou seest the condition they are in; board her with thy ship upon her lee quarter, and so enter her from the ship. I am persuaded thou wilt take her without fighting, for there is some mischief has befallen the ship, which we know nothing of."

In a word, it being a smooth sea, and little wind, I took his advice, and laid her aboard. Immediately our men entered the ship, where we found a large ship, with upwards of 600 negroes, men and women, boys and girls, and not one Christian or white man on board. I was struck with horror at the sight; for immediately I concluded, as was partly the case, that these black devils had got loose, had murdered all the white men, and thrown them into the sea; and I had no sooner told my mind to the men, but the thought so enraged them that I had much ado to keep my men from cutting them all in pieces. But William, with many persuasions, prevailed upon them, by telling them that it was nothing but what, if they were in the negroes' condition, they would do if they could; and that the negroes had really the highest injustice done them, to be sold for slaves without their consent; and that the law of nature dictated it to them; that they ought not to kill them, and that it would be wilful murder to do it.

This prevailed with them, and cooled their first heat; so they only knocked down twenty or thirty of them, and the rest ran all down between decks to their first places, believing, as we fancied, that we were their first masters come again.

It was a most unaccountable difficulty we had next; for we could not make them understand one word we said, nor could we understand one word ourselves that they said. We endeavoured by signs to ask them whence

they came; but they could make nothing of it. We pointed to the great cabin, to the round-house, to the cook-room, then to our faces, to ask if they had no white men on board, and where they were gone; but they could not understand what we meant. On the other hand, they pointed to our boat and to their ship, asking questions as well as they could, and said a thousand things, and expressed themselves with great earnestness; but we could not understand a word of it all, or know what they meant by any of their signs.

We knew very well they must have been taken on board the ship as slaves, and that it must be by some European people too. We could easily see that the ship was a Dutch-built ship, but very much altered, having been built upon, and, as we supposed, in France; for we found two or three French books on board, and afterwards we found clothes, linen, lace, some old shoes, and several other things. We found among the provisions some barrels of Irish beef, some Newfoundland fish, and several other evidences that there had been Christians on board, but saw no remains of them. We found not a sword, gun, pistol, or weapon of any kind, except some cutlasses; and the negroes had hid them below where they lay. We asked them what was become of all the small arms, pointing to our own and to the places where those belonging to the ship had hung. One of the negroes understood me presently, and beckoned to me to come upon the deck, where, taking my fuzee, which I never let go out of my hand for some time after we had mastered the ship — I say, offering to take hold of it, he made the proper motion of throwing it into the sea; by which I understood, as I did afterwards, that they had thrown all the small arms, powder, shot, swords, etc., into the sea, believing, as I supposed, those things would kill them, though the men were gone.

After we understood this we made no question but that the ship's crew, having been surprised by these desperate rogues, had gone the same way, and had been thrown overboard also. We looked all over the ship to see if we could find any blood, and we thought we did perceive some in several places; but the heat of the sun, melting the pitch and tar upon the decks, made it impossible for us to discern it exactly, except in the round-house, where we plainly saw that there had been much blood. We found the scuttle open, by which we supposed that the captain and those that were with

him had made their retreat into the great cabin, or those in the cabin had made their escape up into the round-house. But that which confirmed us most of all in what had happened was that, upon further inquiry, we found that there were seven or eight of the negroes very much wounded, two or three of them with shot, whereof one had his leg broken and lay in a miserable condition, the flesh being mortified, and, as our friend William said, in two days more he would have died. William was a most dexterous surgeon, and he showed it in this cure; for though all the surgeons we had on board both our ships (and we had no less than five that called themselves bred surgeons, besides two or three who were pretenders or assistants) — though all these gave their opinions that the negro's leg must be cut off, and that his life could not be saved without it; that the mortification had touched the marrow in the bone, that the tendons were mortified, and that he could never have the use of his leg if it should be cured, William said nothing in general, but that his opinion was otherwise, and that he desired the wound might be searched, and that he would then tell them further. Accordingly he went to work with the leg; and, as he desired that he might have some of the surgeons to assist him, we appointed him two of the ablest of them to help, and all of them to look on, if they thought fit.

William went to work his own way, and some of them pretended to find fault at first. However, he proceeded and searched every part of the leg where he suspected the mortification had touched it; in a word, he cut off a great deal of mortified flesh, in all which the poor fellow felt no pain. William proceeded till he brought the vessels which he had cut to bleed, and the man to cry out; then he reduced the splinters of the bone, and, calling for help, set it, as we call it, and bound it up, and laid the man to rest, who found himself much easier than before.

At the first opening the surgeons began to triumph; the mortification seemed to spread, and a long red streak of blood appeared from the wound upwards to the middle of the man's thigh, and the surgeons told me the man would die in a few hours. I went to look at it, and found William himself under some surprise; but when I asked him how long he thought the poor fellow could live, he looked gravely at me, and said, "As long as thou canst; I am not at all apprehensive of his life," said he,

"but I would cure him, if I could, without making a cripple of him." I found he was not just then upon the operation as to his leg, but was mixing up something to give the poor creature, to repel, as I thought, the spreading contagion, and to abate or prevent any feverish temper that might happen in the blood; after which he went to work again, and opened the leg in two places above the wound, cutting out a great deal of mortified flesh, which it seemed was occasioned by the bandage, which had pressed the parts too much; and withal, the blood being at the time in a more than common disposition to mortify, might assist to spread it.

Well, our friend William conquered all this, cleared the spreading mortification, and the red streak went off again, the flesh began to heal, and the matter to run; and in a few days the man's spirits began to recover, his pulse beat regular, he had no fever, and gathered strength daily; and, in a word, he was a perfect sound man in about ten weeks, and we kept him amongst us, and made him an able seaman. But to return to the ship: we never could come at a certain information about it, till some of the negroes which we kept on board, and whom we taught to speak English, gave the account of it afterwards, and this maimed man in particular.

We inquired, by all the signs and motions we could imagine, what was become of the people, and yet we could get nothing from them. Our lieutenant was for torturing some of them to make them confess, but William opposed that vehemently; and when he heard it was under consideration he came to me. "Friend," says he, "I make a request to thee not to put any of these poor wretches to torment." "Why, William," said I, "why not? You see they will not give any account of what is become of the white men." "Nay," says William, "do not say so; I suppose they have given thee a full account of every particular of it." "How so?" says I; "pray what are we the wiser for all their jabbering?" "Nay," says William, "that may be thy fault, for aught I know; thou wilt not punish the poor men because they cannot speak English; and perhaps they never heard a word of English before. Now, I may very well suppose that they have given thee a large account of everything; for thou seest with what earnestness, and how long, some of them have talked to thee; and if thou canst not understand their language, nor they thine, how can they help that? At the best,

thou dost but suppose that they have not told thee the whole truth of the story; and, on the contrary, I suppose they have; and how wilt thou decide the question, whether thou art right or whether I am right? Besides, what can they say to thee when thou askest them a question, upon the torture, and at the same time they do not understand the question, and thou dost not know whether they say ay or no?"

It is no compliment to my moderation to say I was convinced by these reasons; and yet we had all much ado to keep our second lieutenant from murdering some of them, to make them tell. What if they had told? He did not understand one word of it; but he would not be persuaded but that the negroes must needs understand him when he asked them whether the ship had any boat or no, like ours, and what was become of it.

But there was no remedy but to wait till we made these people understand English, and to adjourn the story till that time.

JONATHAN SWIFT (1667-1745)

FROM THE TALE OF A TUB

THE PREFACE

The wits of the present age being so very numerous and penetrating, it seems the grandees of Church and State begin to fall under horrible apprehensions lest these gentlemen, during the intervals of a long peace, should find leisure to pick holes in the weak sides of religion and government. To prevent which, there has been much thought employed of late upon certain projects for taking off the force and edge of those formidable inquirers from canvassing and reasoning upon such delicate points. They have at length fixed upon one, which will require some time as well as cost to perfect. Meanwhile, the danger hourly increasing, as by new levies of wits, all appointed (as there is reason to fear) with pen, ink, and paper, which may at an hour's warning be drawn out into pamphlets and other offensive weapons ready for immediate execution, it was judged of absolute necessity that some present expedient be thought on till the main design can be brought to maturity. To this end, at a grand committee, some days ago, this important discovery was made by a certain curious and refined observer, that seamen have a custom when they meet a Whale to fling him

out an empty Tub, by way of amusement, to divert him from laying violent hands upon the Ship. This parable was immediately mythologised; the Whale was interpreted to be Hobbes's "Leviathan," which tosses and plays with all other schemes of religion and government, whereof a great many are hollow, and dry, and empty, and noisy, and wooden, and given to rotation. This is the Leviathan from whence the terrible wits of our age are said to borrow their weapons. The Ship in danger is easily understood to be its old antitype the commonwealth. But how to analyse the Tub was a matter of difficulty, when, after long inquiry and debate, the literal meaning was preserved, and it was decreed that, in order to prevent these Leviathans from tossing and sporting with the commonwealth, which of itself is too apt to fluctuate, they should be diverted from that game by "A Tale of a Tub." And my genius being conceived to lie not unhappily that way, I had the honour done me to be engaged in the performance.

This is the sole design in publishing the following treatise, which I hope will serve for an interim of some months to employ those unquiet spirits till the perfecting of that great work, into the secret of which it is reasonable the courteous reader should have some little light.

It is intended that a large Academy be erected, capable of containing nine thousand seven hundred forty and three persons, which, by modest computation, is reckoned to be pretty near the current number of wits in this island. These are to be disposed into the several schools of this Academy, and there pursue those studies to which their genius most inclines them. The undertaker himself will publish his proposals with all convenient speed, to which I shall refer the curious reader for a more particular account, mentioning at present only a few of the principal schools. There is, first, a large pederastic school, with French and Italian masters; there is also the spelling school, a very spacious building; the school of looking-glasses; the school of swearing; the school of critics; the school of salivation; the school of hobby-horses; the school of poetry; the school of tops; the school of spleen; the school of gaming; with many others too tedious to recount. No person to be admitted member into any of these schools without an attestation under two sufficient persons' hands certifying him to be a wit.

But to return. I am sufficiently instructed in

the principal duty of a preface if my genius were capable of arriving at it. Thrice have I forced my imagination to take the tour of my invention, and thrice it has returned empty, the latter having been wholly drained by the following treatise. Not so my more successful brethren the moderns, who will by no means let slip a preface or dedication without some notable distinguishing stroke to surprise the reader at the entry, and kindle a wonderful expectation of what is to ensue. Such was that of a most ingenious poet, who, soliciting his brain for something new, compared himself to the hangman and his patron to the patient. This was *insigne, recens, indictum ore alio*.¹ When I went through that necessary and noble course of study,² I had the happiness to observe many such egregious touches, which I shall not injure the authors by transplanting, because I have remarked that nothing is so very tender as a modern piece of wit, and which is apt to suffer so much in the carriage. Some things are extremely witty to-day, or fasting, or in this place, or at eight o'clock, or over a bottle, or spoke by Mr. Whatdycall'm, or in a summer's morning, any of which, by the smallest transposal or misapplication, is utterly annihilate. Thus wit has its walks and purlieus, out of which it may not stray the breadth of a hair, upon peril of being lost. The moderns have artfully fixed this Mercury, and reduced it to the circumstances of time, place, and person. Such a jest there is that will not pass out of Covent Garden, and such a one that is nowhere intelligible but at Hyde Park Corner. Now, though it sometimes tenderly affects me to consider that all the towardly passages I shall deliver in the following treatise will grow quite out of date and relish with the first shifting of the present scene, yet I must need subscribe to the justice of this proceeding, because I cannot imagine why we should be at expense to furnish wit for succeeding ages, when the former have made no sort of provision for ours; wherein I speak the sentiment of the very newest, and consequently the most orthodox refiners, as well as my own. However, being extremely solicitous that every accomplished person who has got into the taste of wit calculated for this present month of August 1697 should descend to the very bottom of all the sublime throughout this treatise, I hold it fit to lay down this general maxim. Whatever reader desires

¹ Notable, new, and unspoken by another.

² Reading prefaces, etc. — *Swift's note*.

to have a thorough comprehension of an author's thoughts, cannot take a better method than by putting himself into the circumstances and posture of life that the writer was in upon every important passage as it flowed from his pen, for this will introduce a parity and strict correspondence of ideas between the reader and the author. Now, to assist the diligent reader in so delicate an affair, as far as brevity will permit I have recollected that the shrewdest pieces of this treatise were conceived in bed in a garret. At other times (for a reason best known to myself) I thought fit to sharpen my invention with hunger, and in general the whole work was begun, continued, and ended under a long course of physic and a great want of money. Now, I do affirm it will be absolutely impossible for the candid peruser to go along with me in a great many bright passages, unless upon the several difficulties emergent he will please to capacitate and prepare himself by these directions. And this I lay down as my principal *postulatum*.

Because I have professed to be a most devoted servant of all modern forms, I apprehend some curious wit may object against me for proceeding thus far in a preface without declaiming, according to custom, against the multitude of writers whereof the whole multitude of writers most reasonably complain. I am just come from perusing some hundreds of prefaces, wherein the authors do at the very beginning address the gentle reader concerning this enormous grievance. Of these I have preserved a few examples, and shall set them down as near as my memory has been able to retain them.

One begins thus: "For a man to set up for a writer when the press swarms with," etc.

Another: "The tax upon paper does not lessen the number of scribblers who daily pester," etc.

Another: "When every little would-be wit takes pen in hand, 'tis in vain to enter the lists," etc.

Another: "To observe what trash the press swarms with," etc.

Another: "Sir, it is merely in obedience to your commands that I venture into the public, for who upon a less consideration would be of a party with such a rabble of scribblers," etc.

Now, I have two words in my own defence against this objection. First, I am far from granting the number of writers a nuisance to

our nation, having strenuously maintained the contrary in several parts of the following discourse; secondly, I do not well understand the justice of this proceeding, because I observe many of these polite prefaces to be not only from the same hand, but from those who are most voluminous in their several productions; upon which I shall tell the reader a short tale.

A mountebank in Leicester Fields had drawn a huge assembly about him. Among the rest, a fat unwieldy fellow, half stifed in the press, would be every fit crying out, "Lord! what a filthy crowd is here. Pray, good people, give way a little. Bless me! what a devil has raked this rabble together. Z—ds, what squeezing is this? Honest friend, remove your elbow." At last a weaver that stood next him could hold no longer. "A plague confound you," said he, "for an overgrown sloven; and who in the devil's name, I wonder, helps to make up the crowd half so much as yourself? Don't you consider that you take up more room with that carcass than any five here? Is not the place as free for us as for you? Bring your own guts to a reasonable compass, and then I'll engage we shall have room enough for us all."

There are certain common privileges of a writer, the benefit whereof I hope there will be no reason to doubt; particularly that where I am not understood, it shall be concluded that something very useful and profound is couched underneath; and again, that whatever word or sentence is printed in a different character shall be judged to contain something extraordinary either of wit or sublimity.

As for the liberty I have thought fit to take of praising myself, upon some occasions or none, I am sure it will need no excuse if a multitude of great examples be allowed sufficient authority; for it is here to be noted that praise was originally a pension paid by the world, but the moderns, finding the trouble and charge too great in collecting it, have lately bought out the fee-simple, since which time the right of presentation is wholly in ourselves. For this reason it is that when an author makes his own eulogy, he uses a certain form to declare and insist upon his title, which is commonly in these or the like words, "I speak without vanity," which I think plainly shows it to be a matter of right and justice. Now, I do here once for all declare, that in every encounter of this nature through the following treatise the form aforesaid is implied, which I mention to save the trouble of repeating it on so many occasions.

It is a great ease to my conscience that I have written so elaborate and useful a discourse without one grain of satire intermixed, which is the sole point wherein I have taken leave to dissent from the famous originals of our age and country. I have observed some satirists to use the public much at the rate that pedants do a naughty boy ready horsed for discipline. First expostulate the case, then plead the necessity of the rod from great provocations, and conclude every period with a lash. Now, if I know anything of mankind, these gentlemen might very well spare their reproof and correction, for there is not through all Nature another so callous and insensible a member as the world's posteriors, whether you apply to it the toe or the birch. Besides, most of our late satirists seem to lie under a sort of mistake, that because nettles have the prerogative to sting, therefore all other weeds must do so too. I make not this comparison out of the least design to detract from these worthy writers, for it is well known among mythologists that weeds have the preëminence over all other vegetables; and therefore the first monarch of this island whose taste and judgment were so acute and refined, did very wisely root out the roses from the collar of the order and plant the thistles in their stead, as the nobler flower of the two. For which reason it is conjectured by profounder antiquaries that the satirical itch, so prevalent in this part of our island, was first brought among us from beyond the Tweed. Here may it long flourish and abound; may it survive and neglect the scorn of the world with as much ease and contempt as the world is insensible to the lashes of it. May their own dulness, or that of their party, be no discouragement for the authors to proceed; but let them remember it is with wits as with razors, which are never so apt to cut those they are employed on as when they have lost their edge. Besides, those whose teeth are too rotten to bite are best of all others qualified to revenge that defect with their breath.

I am not, like other men, to envy or undervalue the talents I cannot reach, for which reason I must needs bear a true honour to this large eminent sect of our British writers. And I hope this little panegyric will not be offensive to their ears, since it has the advantage of being only designed for themselves. Indeed, Nature herself has taken order that fame and honour should be purchased at a better pennyworth by satire than by any other

productions of the brain, the world being soonest provoked to praise by lashes, as men are to love. There is a problem in an ancient author why dedications and other bundles of flattery run all upon stale musty topics, without the smallest tincture of anything new, not only to the torment and nauseating of the Christian reader, but, if not suddenly prevented, to the universal spreading of that pestilent disease the lethargy in this island, whereas there is very little satire which has not something in it untouched before. The defects of the former are usually imputed to the want of invention among those who are dealers in that kind; but I think with a great deal of injustice, the solution being easy and natural, for the materials of panegyric being very few in number, have been long since exhausted; for as health is but one thing, and has been always the same, whereas diseases are by thousands, besides new and daily additions, so all the virtues that have been ever in mankind are to be counted upon a few fingers, but his follies and vices are innumerable, and time adds hourly to the heap. Now the utmost a poor poet can do is to get by heart a list of the cardinal virtues and deal them with his utmost liberality to his hero or his patron. He may ring the changes as far as it will go, and vary his phrase till he has talked round, but the reader quickly finds it is all pork, with a little variety of sauce, for there is no inventing terms of art beyond our ideas, and when ideas are exhausted, terms of art must be so too.

But though the matter for panegyric were as fruitful as the topics of satire, yet would it not be hard to find out a sufficient reason why the latter will be always better received than the first; for this being bestowed only upon one or a few persons at a time, is sure to raise envy, and consequently ill words, from the rest who have no share in the blessing. But satire, being levelled at all, is never resented for an offence by any, since every individual person makes bold to understand it of others, and very wisely removes his particular part of the burden upon the shoulders of the World, which are broad enough and able to bear it. To this purpose I have sometimes reflected upon the difference between Athens and England with respect to the point before us. In the Attic commonwealth it was the privilege and birthright of every citizen and poet to rail aloud and in public, or to expose upon the stage by name any person they pleased,