

COLONEL JACK.

BY DANIEL DE FOE.

Colonel Jack is the story of a young thief, and De Foe's object, in writing it, was to show the thousand miseries and crimes that wait on the absence of education, in those whom nature had designed to have been even the happiest and the most virtuous. "Here is room," he said, in his original preface to the work, and with his usual manliness and humanity, "for just and copious observations on the blessings and advantages of a sober and well-governed education, and the ruin of so many thousands of all ranks in this nation for the want of it. The miserable condition of multitudes of youth, many of whose natural tempers are docile, and would lead them to learn the best things rather than the worst, is truly deplorable, and is abundantly seen in the history of this man's childhood; where, though circumstances forced him by necessity to be a thief, surprising rectitude of principles remained with him, and made him early abhor the worst part of his trade, and at length forsake the whole of it."

It will be easy to show, by an extract, the intensity of literal truth with which this wise and noble lesson is taught in the fiction of De Foe. Perhaps nothing finer in this respect was ever written than the first half of the novel of *Colonel Jack*.

The Colonel is the youngest of three poor beggar boys, all named John, all brought up together to the arts of thievery, and dubbed for distinction's sake, Captain, Major, and Colonel. The Captain's seniority in crime and in punishment does not avail to deter the Major, who makes his debut as a thief in due course, and astonishes the little Colonel, who is yet quite innocent of all such things, by suddenly displaying its results in the shape of seven and sixpence. They go together to Rag fair to buy themselves shoes and stockings, and think their riches fineless.

"Hark ye, Major Jack, you and I never had money in our lives before, and we never had a good dinner in all our lives; what if we should go somewhere and get some victuals? I am very hungry."

"So we will then," says the major, "I am hungry too;" so we went to a boiling cook's in Rosemary lane, where we treated ourselves nobly, and, as I thought with myself, we began to live like gentlemen, for we had three-pennyworth of boiled beef, two-pennyworth of pudding, a penny brick (as they call it, or loaf), and a whole pint of strong beer, which was 7d. in all.

"N. B. We had each of us a good mess of charming beef broth into the bargain; and which cheered my heart wonderfully, all the while we were at dinner the maid and the boy in the house, every time they passed by the open box where we sat at our dinner, would look in, and cry, 'Gentlemen, do you call?' and 'Do ye call, gentlemen?' I say this was as good to me as all my dinner."

This is very homely, yet oh! how wonderfully exact and true it is! But let us observe to what lofty uses this homely writing may be turned. We are going to quote one of the most exquisite and affecting descriptions contained in the whole vast and varied range of English literature. It may be appealed to as the best living expression of De Foe's genius, and is probably finer than any thing in *Robinson Crusoe*.

Colonel Jack becomes concerned in a robbery, and receives five pounds as his share of the plunder. A common writer—a man of good repute, however, and in great favour at the circulating libraries—would, no doubt, at this happy crisis in his hero's fate, have filled his little heart with hope and courage, and made him happiest, as he was richest, of beggar boys. The genius of the higher artist cannot be too carefully discriminated, or too much admired. Colonel Jack's miseries and ill gotten wealth begin together.

"I have often thought since that, and with some mirth too, how I had really more wealth than I knew what to do with, for lodging I had none, nor any box or drawer to hide my money in, nor had I any pocket, but such as I say was full of holes; I knew nobody in the world that I could go and desire them to lay it up for me; for being a poor, naked, ragged boy, they would presently say I had robbed somebody, and perhaps lay hold of me, and my money would be my crime, as they say it often is in foreign countries; and now, as I was full of wealth, behold I was full of care, for what to do to secure my money I could not tell; and this held me so long, and was so vexatious to me the next day, that I truly sat down and cried."

Nothing could be more perplexing than this money was to me all that night. I carried it in my hand a good while, for it was in gold all but 14s. that is to say, it was four guineas, and that 14s. was more difficult to carry than the four guineas. At last I sat down and pulled off one of my shoes, and put the four guineas into that; but after I had gone awhile, my shoe hurt me so I could not go, so I was fain to sit down again, and take it out of my shoe, and carry it in my hand; then I found a dirty linen rag in the street, and I took that up, and wrapt it altogether, and carried it in that a good way. I have often since heard people say, when they have been talking of money that they could not get in, I wish I had it in a foul clout: in truth, I had mine in a foul clout; for it was foul, according to the letter of that saying, but it served me till I came to a convenient place, and then I sat down and washed the cloth in the kennel, and so then put my money in again.

"Well, I carried it home with me to my lodging in the glass-house, and when I went to go to sleep, I knew not what to do

with it; if I had let any of the black crew I was with know of it, I should have been smothered in the ashes for it, or robbed of it; or some trick or other put upon me for it; so I knew not what to do, but lay with it in my hand, and my hand in my bosom, but then sleep went from my eyes. Oh the weight of human care! I, a poor beggar boy, could not sleep, so soon as I had but a little money to keep, who, before that, could have slept upon a heap of brick bats, stones, or cinders, or any where, as sound as a rich man does on his down bed, and sounder too."

"Every now and then dropping asleep, I should dream that my money was lost, and start like one frightened; then, finding it fast in my hand, try to go to sleep again, but could not for a long while, then drop and start again. At last a fancy came into my head, that if I fell asleep, I should dream of the money, and talk of it in my sleep, and tell that I had money; which if I should do, and one of the rogues should hear me, they would pick it out of my bosom, and of my hand too, without waking me; and after that thought I could not sleep a wink more; so I passed that night over in care and anxiety enough, and this, I may safely say, was the first night's rest that I lost by the cares of this life, and the deceitfulness of riches."

"As soon as it was day I got out of the hole we lay in, and rambled abroad in the fields towards Stepney, and there I mused and considered what I should do with this money, and many a time I wished that I had not had it; for, after all my ruminating upon it, and what course I should take with it, or where I should put it, I could not hit upon any one thing, or any possible method to secure it, and it perplexed me so, that at last, as I said just now, I sat down and cried heartily."

"When my crying was over, the case was the same; I had the money still, and what to do with it I could not tell; at last it came into my head that I should look out for some hole in a tree, and see to hide it there till I should have occasion for it. Big with this discovery, as I then thought it, I began to look about me for a tree; but there were no trees in the fields about Stepney or Mile-end that looked fit for my purpose; and if there were any that I began to look narrowly at, the fields were so full of people, that they would see if I went to hide any thing there, and I thought the people eyed me, as it were, and that two men in particular followed me to see what I intended to do."

"This drove me further off, and I crossed the road at Mile end, and in the middle of the town went down a lane that goes away to the Blind Beggar's at Bethnal green. When I got a little way in the lane I found a foot-path over the fields, and in those fields several trees for my turn, as I thought, at last, one tree had a little hole in it, pretty high out of my reach, and I climbed up the tree to get it, and when I came there, I put my hand in, and found, as I thought, a place very fit; so I placed my treasure there, and was mightily well satisfied with it; but behold, putting my hand in again, to lay it more commodiously, as I thought, of a sudden it slipped away from me, and I found the tree was hollow, and my little parcel was fallen in out of my reach, and how far it might go in I knew not; so that, in a word, my money was quite gone, irrecoverably lost; there could be no room so much as to hope ever to see it again, for 'twas a vast great tree."

"As young as I was, I was now sensible what a fool I was before, that I could not think of ways to keep my money, but I must come thus far to throw it into a hole where I could not reach it: well, I thrust my hand quite up to my elbow, but no bottom was to be found, nor any end of the hole or cavity; I got a stick of the tree, and thrust it in a great way, but all was one; then I cried nay, roared out, I was in such a passion; then I got down the tree again, then up again, and thrust in my hand again till I scratched my arm and made it bleed, and cried all the while most violently; then I began to think I had not so much as a halfpenny of it left for a halfpenny roll, and I was hungry, and then I cried again: then I came away in despair, crying and roaring like a little boy that had been whipped: then I went back again to the tree, and up the tree again, and thus I did several times."

"The last time I had gotten up the tree I happened to come down not on the same side that I went up and came down before, but on the other side of the tree, and on the other side of the bank also; and, behold, the tree had a great open place in the side of it close to the ground, as old hollow trees often have; and looking in the open place, to my inexpressible joy, there lay my money and my linen rag, all wrapped up just as I had put it into the hole: for the tree being hollow all the way up, there had been some moss or light stuff, which I had not judgment enough to know was not firm, that had given way when it came to drop out of my hand, and so it had slipped quite down at once."

"I was but a child, and I rejoiced like a child, for I hollow'd quite out loud when I saw it; then I ran to it and snatched it up, hugged and kissed the dirty rag a hundred times; then danced and jumped about, ran from one end of the field to the other, and, in short, I knew not what, much less do I know now what I did, though I shall never forget the thing, either what a sinking grief it was to my heart when I thought I had lost it, or what a flood of joy overwhelmed me when I had got it again."

"While I was in the first transport of my joy, as I have said, I ran about, and knew not what I did; but when that was over, I sat down, opened the foul clout the money was in, looked at it, told it, found it was all there, and then I fell a crying as violently as I did before, when I thought I had lost it."

We had marked other passages for extract, but masterly as they are they would follow feebly after this. Every part of the fiction is written with equal earnestness, and an equal power of identification with absolute truth. It falls off in the latter half of it from no lack of these attributes, but because De Foe, probably from even too great a reliance on them, has gone too much into merely common-place incident.

The title of the book, since it expresses little Jack's fortunes, may amuse the reader. "The history of the most remarkable life and extraordinary adventures of the truly honourable Colonel Jacques, vulgarly called Colonel Jack, who was born a gentleman, put apprentice to a pickpocket, flourished six-and-twenty years as a thief, and was then kidnapped to Virginia: came back a merchant, was five times married, went into the wars, behaved bravely, got preferment, was made Colonel of a regiment; returned again to England, followed the fortunes of the Chevalier de St. George, was taken at the Preston Rebellion; received his pardon from the late King; is now at the head of his regiment, in the service of the Czarina, fighting against the Turks, completing a life of wonders; and resolves to die a General."

From a Winter in Iceland, &c. &c.

REVOLUTION IN ICELAND.

In 1809 a humorous civil broil, or attempted usurpation occurred, which gave the Icelanders a piece of entertainment to carry them out of their melancholy thoughts. One Jorgen Jorgensen, originally a prisoner of war, and afterwards a midshipman in a British man-of-war, upon the breaking out of the war with Denmark, returned to his native country and took the command of a sloop, but was captured by an English vessel. Being now upon his parole in London, he met with a Mr. Phelps, an extensive soap-boiler, to whom he represented the advantages that might be derived from opening a trade in tallow with Iceland, while the Danes were excluded from it. Phelps, dazzled by these representations, dispatched Jorgen with a cargo, and appointed a half-French, half-Englishman, named Savignac, as supercargo. Upon their arrival however, the governor interdicted all dealings, and Jorgen returned in ballast, leaving, however, Savignac behind. Phelps, however, was not discouraged, and fitted out another vessel, the "Margaret and Anne," and providing himself with a letter of marque, went this time in person:—

"On his arrival, he seized a Danish vessel called the 'Orion,' in virtue of a letter of marque. Savignac, also, gave his employer to understand that the governor had offered a reward for Mr. Phelps' head. Upon hearing this, the merchant ordered his captain to seize the person of the governor, who was accordingly arrested on a Sunday afternoon, as the people were coming from church, and put on board the 'Margaret and Anne,' where he was kept in strict confinement."

"Jorgensen, who had hitherto been quiet, now came forward, and seized upon the reins of government. He began by issuing a proclamation, by which he declared Iceland an independent republic, to be placed under the protection of Great Britain, and decided upon three white stockfish upon a blue ground for its flag. He also undertook to put the country in a state of defence, and to restore the ancient form of government; but as these changes would require some time to effect, he took upon himself the labour of ruling the land, until such time as the constitution should be sufficiently established to work without his aid; and he satisfied himself with taking the modest titles of 'Protector of Iceland and Commander by Sea and Land.'

"As he felt the utility of pecuniary resources, he declared all the property belonging to the Danes forfeited to the State; and in order to render himself popular with the natives, he sold them the grain belonging to the former at half price. Among other means that he took to turn the trade into the hands of his employers, and to prevent any attempt at residence, he ordered all the Danes to give up their arms, and forbade them, under pain of instant death, to stir out of their houses. Backed by the guns of the 'Margaret and Anne,' which could blow up the town and its inhabitants in less than half an hour, Jorgensen was too formidable to be resisted by the Danes, who were, besides, dispirited by the loss of their governor, and he quietly took possession and installed himself in the dwelling of the latter."

"Having now formed a body-guard, from some thieves that he picked up and rigged out as soldiers, he set about his changes, turning out one magistrate, imprisoning another, and plundering Danes whenever he had an opportunity. To redeem his promise of putting the island in a state of defence, he caused six rusty guns to be dragged from Bessestad, where they had lain for near two hundred years, and with them mounted a battery for the protection of the town. The wool that was purchased by Phelps, during the summer, was put up in bales, so as to form a breastwork, and as military an appearance as possible given to the whole."

"It is uncertain how far he would have carried his plans into execution, had he met with no foreign obstacle. It has been said that he was backed by some influential Icelanders, who preferred the English to the Danish government, and, no doubt, the prudence of many of his orders indicate, that he was directed by persons who were well acquainted with every detail relative to the country. The people, however, were too dispersed, and too unaccustomed to agitation, to take a warm part in the revolution, and Jer-