

ALEXANDER SELKIRK.

OTHERWISE KNOWN AS ROBINSON CRUSOE.

The True Story of the Real Castaway—A Very Different Thing from De Foe's Tale—In exciting Facts About the Island of Juan Fernandez.

For all the thousands of boys who have read the enchanting pages of "Robinson Crusoe," there is probably not one who has not asked: Is it true? And it is also probable that not one out of ten thousand who asked that question received an approximately intelligent answer.

To gratify my own curiosity, I have made considerable research among records which relate to Alexander Selkirk, whose solitary sojourn upon the island of Juan Fernandez furnished the nucleus for the most famous tale of adventure which the world has ever read, and can but think that many who have asked themselves the question, how much of Robinson Crusoe is true? will find interest and pleasure in a brief statement of the facts of the strange career of the Scottish sailor who served as Daniel Defoe's "original" Robinson Crusoe.

Selkirk's birthplace was in the little seaport town, Largo, county of Fife, Scotland, and the year of his birth 1676, and here he spent the first thirteen years of his life.

According to an ancient Scottish superstition, a seventh son, born without an intervening daughter, was bound to be a favorite of fate, and would become a great man. As the circumstances of Alexander's birth met all the requirements of the tradition, it is not strange that Mrs. Selkirk secretly nursed large hopes for her seventh lad, notwithstanding the fact that her husband John, a hard, practical, and high-tempered old shoemaker, held such dreams to be nonsense, and determined that Alexander should settle down to the shoemaker's bench, and learn a quiet, honest trade. Thus Alexander and his future became a bone of contention between the hard, unloving, and sometimes cruel, old Scotchman and his gentle, shrinking wife, whose heart was full of dreams for her pet son.

This unfortunate state of family feeling could have but one result: it made Alexander disobedient, headstrong, and discontented with life and all its wholesome restraints and occupations and made him determined to break away and enter upon the great career before him.

By the time Alexander reached the age of nineteen, he had acquired a fair knowledge of reading, writing, arithmetic, and considerable information concerning navigation, together with a well-merited reputation for being a wild boy.

In England and Scotland the records of the churches were carefully kept and preserved, and in the Presbyterian Church, in which John Selkirk was an "elder," is the following entry:

"August 25, 1695. Alexander Selraig, son of John Selraig, Elder, cited to appear before the session for indecent conduct in church."

This "indecent conduct" seems to have been laughing aloud. Two days later another entry was made:

"August 27th. Alexander Selraig called out; did not appear, having gone to sea. Continued until his return."

The citation appears to have been thoroughly outlawed, for, according to an old Scottish narrative, Alexander spent the next six years scouring the southern seas with buccaneers, who were a sort of semi-legalized pirates.

But when he did return Alexander made up in misconduct for all time lost during his absence. He quarreled with a half-witted brother and pounded him with a stick. For this he was sentenced by the sessions of the church to stand up and face the whole Sabbath congregation of the church—an humiliating punishment as the church dignitaries knew how to inflict upon a young man of spirit.

But young Selkirk took this bitter medicine with brazen stoicism. This was in November, 1701; and the next year found him in England, booked for sea under the standard of Dampier, one of the most celebrated characters in all the annals of buccaneering.

France and Spain were then at war with England and other northern countries, and Dampier secured permission from the crown to prey upon French and Spanish merchantmen and colonies. Wealthy London gentlemen furnished him with two twenty-six gun vessels, Fame and St. George. Dampier had associated with him a man named Pulling, who was to command the former vessel.

Just as they were ready to set out upon their plundering expedition, Pulling and Dampier quarreled, and the former sailed away, to unknown shores, with the Fame, and left Dampier to secure another vessel. This he did. She was called the Cinque Ports, and was officered as follows: "Charles Pickering, Captain; Thomas Stradling, Lieutenant; Alexander Selkirk, Sailing Master."

The treachery of Pulling, and the delay which resulted, caused Dampier to miss the capture of certain Spanish galleons, with their millions of treasures,

ment of the expedition, and at the island of Le Grand, where the vessels put in for repairs and supplies, nine of the men deserted. But this was not the worst misfortune. Pickering, commander of the Cinque Ports, died here, and was succeeded by Lieutenant Stradling, who

his wild spirit and bring into his whole after-life a gentleness which had been entirely wanting before.

An invoice of his possessions shows him to have taken from the ship "bedding, clothing, a firelock, a pound of gunpowder, bullets, flint and steel, several pounds of tobacco, a hatchet, a knife, a kettle, a flip can, a Bible, some books on devotion and one or two books on navigation, and some mathematical instruments."

He built himself two huts of pimento wood, and one narrative, not authentic, however, gives a description of his cave, which is not mentioned in the most trustworthy account.

Selkirk found an abundance of tropical fruits on his island, and also numerous rats, cats, and goats—but no savages.

For nearly two years Selkirk kept quite closely to the beach and watched for a friendly sail; but gradually he became more and more content with his solitary lot, and found a joy in the quiet round of the days, which he spent in chasing the wild goats and domesticating them, taming cats, adding to his comforts, reading his Bible, and praying aloud.

Although he several times caught sight of a sail upon the distant horizon, only two ships ever dropped anchor in his harbor previous to his deliverance, which occurred at 2 o'clock on the afternoon of January 31, 1709. These ships were both Spanish vessels, and would have carried him into a fearful slavery had he been indiscreet enough to have

been cordially hated by the entire crew. To add to the general discontent, Selkirk dreamed that the voyage was to be ill-fated, and in those days dreams counted for much more than they do now.

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