

The Tragedy of Crusoe, C.S.¹ (From a Correspondent.)



Published: *Civil and Military Gazette*, 13 September 1884.

Attribution: The article called ‘Music for the Middle-Aged’, *CMG*, 21 June 1884, included in the *Sussex Scrapbooks* (28/1, p. 1), is signed ‘Jacob Cavendish’, as is ‘The Tragedy of Crusoe’. RK later maintained that more than one writer used the same pseudonym on the *CMG*,² but since the only other Englishman on the editorial staff of the *CMG* was the editor, Stephen Wheeler, and since Wheeler is not known ever to have written anything in the way of fiction or verse, it seems safe to assume that a pseudonym known to have been used by RK was exclusively his, unless there is clear evidence to the contrary.

‘Crusoe’ is probably the item RK refers to in a letter of 17 September 1884 as a ‘specimen’ of ‘a set of weekly articles’ that he intends to begin in the *CMG* in order to liven up the paper (to Edith Macdonald: *Letters*, 1, 76).

Text: *Civil and Military Gazette*.

Notes: This is, so far as is known, the first piece of prose fiction that RK contributed to the *CMG*, which he had joined at the end of October or in early November, 1882. He had had opportunities to indulge his inventiveness in a few poems and in a handful of humorous articles (e.g., ‘Music for the Middle-Aged’ in June 1884), but the paper under Stephen Wheeler was not yet open to RK’s ‘creative’ work. In September 1884, however, Wheeler had gone off to the Hills on vacation and the *CMG* was for the time entirely in RK’s hands, which may explain the appearance of ‘The Tragedy of Crusoe, C.S.’ RK himself had been at Dalhousie, in the Hills, while Wheeler remained in Lahore. They had now switched places, and RK, like Crusoe, had just returned to ‘the island’. RK also thought at this time that his transfer from the *CMG* to its bigger, sister paper, the *Pioneer* of Allahabad, was imminent, so that any move of his that might offend Wheeler would not matter: he would, he supposed, soon be out of Wheeler’s reach.

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THE TRAGEDY OF CRUSOE, C. S.

Monday.—Reacht the Island – I would say the station – this morn, Mrs. Crusoe being, at my own desire, left, it may be for a month or twain in the cooler air of the hills. Now, since we were first wed (and I shall not, even in my own diary, write down how long ago that was) I have never been a day parted from Mrs. Crusoe; which I take it is not altogether becoming to a man of my spirit. Howbeit, yesterday, when I hinted, very gently, at this much to Mrs. Crusoe – for though she is mine own dear wife, yet I dare not speak *all* of my mind to her – she seemed in no way offended, but only laughed a good deal; saying that “men’s insides were made so comical, God help them”,³ and if I had *that* fancy in my brain I had best go to the island and there live as I might for two months, till she saw fit to join me. Though I was a little taken aback, and, to tell the truth not over well pleased, at her ready agreement in my plan, yet I made shift to look vastly content, and left the mountains in so great a haste, that both sherry flask and sandwiches were left behind. This, I hold, was the fault of my wife, who should have given them both to me.

When I reacht the ship – I should say of course my house – I found that it had leakt greatly fore and aft, through the late heavy rains, spoiling my wife’s new spinet, and, what is of far greater importance, many of my newly bound volumes that had but lately come out from England. I spent a dreary day soothing their swelled and blistered backs as well as might be, and thus forgot my tiffin. At dusk I went forth to explore the island, on mine old horse, whom I dare swear that the *sais* hath not exercised any time these two months. By him (the horse, not the *sais*) I was fought with for two miles, and runned away with for another two; the beast only stopping for want of breath. I find the island, as far as I can see, to be wholly uninhabited except by the natives. Nor am I altogether sorry for this, since I cut but an indifferent good figure, this even, laid, for the most part, astride of my horse’s head, and swearing, Lord help me, in a manner that I hoped I had long ago forgotten. Home, exceeding sore and disposed to be very wrath with all about me. I was made none the sweeter when my man Friday told me that there was no whisky in the house. Says I, “How then did Friday manage to get so beastly drunk?” Friday takes me up short at this, and says he is not more drunk than I, but he has been rejoicing at once more meeting his old friend At this he sits down very quick, and says that I am his Father

THE TRAGEDY OF CRUSOE, C.S.

and Mother and goes fast asleep. I cannot find it in my heart to be very angry with Friday, but rather envy one who can be so merry – though it is true he has no library to be ruined by roof leakage. For form's sake I have admonished him with a new leathern punkah rope, its end; and so grimly to dinner at the Club.

Here I fell in with Jones (Cadwallader – He that I quarrelled with last July, because of a horse he sold me) and we dined together alone. He is the only inhabitant of the island; Mrs. Jones, like Mrs. Crusoe, being in the cooler hills. I see that I was a fool ever to fall out with thus pleasant a fellow, and withal one that can talk so well. Moreover, I will at once write to Mrs. Crusoe and tell her that she must call on Mrs. Jones. We two then smoked each other's cheroots in great friendship till close upon midnight, when I returned home; and finding no lights in my house but all in Friday's, I did again fall to with a punkah rope for five good minutes. To bed shortly after, where I lay awake till Friday had howled himself asleep.

Tuesday.—A woful day. This morning came Friday to me, smiling for all the world as though no words had passed between us overnight – whereat I suspected mischief but said nothing. Presently, while I was taking stock of my sodden library, he says:— "*Kerritch hogya*" but I made shift to escape into the garden and there examine the roses. Yet no man can avoid his fate, or, for the matter of that, Friday, when he is bent on being heard. So, at breakfast, I, being in a white-hot heat to get away betimes to work, my man bows himself double and says several times very loud:— "*Kerritch hogya*". Then I thought how Mrs. Crusoe, she that is now at the Hills, would have dealt with him at once, and that with no inconvenience to myself. For, though I can speak Thibetan, Nagri, Malay, and the Lord knows how many other tongues, the barbarous and hybrid speech wherein the affairs of a household are wont to be ordered is a great stumbling-block to me. Friday, methinks knows this, for which I hate him the more. I clutch my hair (what is left of it that is) three several times, and prayed inwardly that Friday might not see the great depths of my ignorance. Then says I, with my finest air:— "*Kitna che?*" "*Sahib,*" says he, "*Sarce che worshter, tael che, nia kunker estubble kiwasti, rye che, marubber che*"⁴ – and if I had not taken him up short there, I believe he would have continued till now. As soon as I had stoppt him he goes off again, like a crazy clock, telling me that Mrs.

THE TRAGEDY OF CRUSOE, C.S.

Crusoe had dismissed her dhobie ere she went hillward, and asked me to get another; that there were three kinds of meat, all good, in the bazar, and I was to choose what I liked best — that I was to say what I would have to eat not only for this week, day by day, but the next and the next. Also he asked whether I should retain the old cook, whose face I had never seen, or whether I should be fed by contract; and a thousand other things that till now I had fancied came in the course of nature — as do *tiffin* and dinner. I have sent him away for a while to fill me a pipe while I try to make ready against his return. Oh that my wife were here!

11 of the clock.— Even though I know that none will read this foolish diary save I, yet I dare not, for very shame, write down all that I have done and suffered within the two hours past. How Friday saw that I, Civil and Sessions Judge and a ruler among men, was helpless as a little babe when there was any talk of *degchies*, storerooms, and the like; how I floundered from one blunder to another (for I hold that housekeeping is in no way man's work) trying all the while to keep up my sorely shrunken dignity; how Friday led me on, little by little, as men coax an unwilling dog into the sea, until he had gauged the sum total of my ignorance; how I sweated and turned hot and cold under his words, as I have often seen prisoners sweat and change colour under mine. All this, I say, I dare not set down. Let it suffice for my humiliation that, at the end of my torment, Friday had roughly, and after his own fashion (which I take it was not of the best), shown how I was to manage my own house in the matter of jam, clean sheets, and two daily meals, and in the doing of it had so trampled on and crushed my spirit, that I could but sign all he wished (and the papers were not few) in hope of being released from his tyranny. But Lord! Lord! how many things be necessary to a man's sustenance whereof I have scarcely even heard the names till today — much less smelt and handled of them. Moreover, I see now what a strange and terrible car of Juggernaut it is that Mrs. Crusoe, my never enough to be valued spouse, controls. I, who have rashly taken its guidance into my hands, and laid spent and prostrate among the wheels whereon I have ridden so smoothly before. All day I have done nothing at all save wonder how Mrs. Crusoe can receive me with so smiling a face each evening, when she is on the island, if this be the kind of torture that falls to her lot. But it may be that she has some management to overcome it, for I have never, now I think, seen signs of

THE TRAGEDY OF CRUSOE, C.S.

it in her face, and this day has gone far to age and sour me, who am still, thank Heaven, a young man for my years.

To the Club again in the evening where I met Cadwallader Jones, but for shame, lest he should laugh at me, durst not enquire how he fared when his wife was away. To bed at midnight, wondering which of all the dainties I had so plenteously provided in the morning would be given me for my next day's meal. Surely it is not too warm for Mrs. Crusoe to visit the island now.

Wednesday.—I am sorry that I ever smote Friday with a punkah rope, for I see that he is minded to poison me. This morn, in my big silver dish, set forth with many flowers and on a fair white cloth, came three sodden fragments of flesh which seemed as though they had been but newly torn from the inside of some dead beast. There was rice also, but I have never eaten small shot, so I put it all aside, and for two rupees of my own money Friday got me certain sardines in a tin, and a very little oil. With these I must stay my stomach as best I can. They taste wondrous fishy, and the tea is smokt and of a new flavour. Mrs. Crusoe never gave me anything like it.

I had naught in the middle of the day at my office – neither meat nor drink – and returned home through the mire in a conveyance hired from a native. (*Nota Bene.*— It was girded about with ropes, like Paul's ship,⁵ and I held both doors shut with my own hands till I was mired to the elbow.) When I askt Friday what he means by sending neither tiffin nor carriage, he says that I gave no order, which was true enough, but I fancied that tiffin was eaten at least once every day by most men. I am very sick and tired and dare not abuse Friday as he deserves, or he will leave me altogether and I shall starve. Was too ill to go to the Club, so gave Friday two annas to get me a cup of tea. It tastes sadly of Friday his hookah. To bed wondering whether starving outright is better than being slowly poisoned, and also what became of the stores I had ordered yesterday. Dreamt that Friday had boiled sardines in tea for my breakfast, and that Mrs. Crusoe stood by with a basket of tripe and laught. A very terrible dream.

Thursday.—Friday hath a new turban with two broad gold stripes and a pink one in the middle, and walks not over steadily. He asks me at nine in the morning what I would eat. Said that I was too sick to attend to work, and desired a savoury omelette. At ten 'twas ready, but there was neither tea, milk, bread, or anything else, saving two forks that

THE TRAGEDY OF CRUSOE, C.S.

were not of the same set, and a plate. Friday says I made no *bundobust*, and my head aches too sorely to reply. Made shift to eat the omelette which, methinks, was of bad eggs mainly; and lay down for the rest of the day, never a soul coming nigh me. In truth I am wrong here. Friday's children did harry an old turkey-cock in the verandah, which was close to my head, for two hours; and I thank Providence that made me a Civil and Sessions Judge and gave me Mrs. Crusoe, for the fever that rackt me till I could stir neither hand nor foot – else I should have assuredly killed them all. In the evening my distemper went from me a little, but am still too weak to eat. Friday hath gone to the bazar and hath forgotten to bring me iced water. To bed, where I dreamt that I smothered Friday and all his children under an omelette of turkey cock's eggs. I have never been wont to dream in this fashion before.

Friday.—The fever left me in the night. Found this morning that I had but one clean shirt, and that frayed and chafed at the wristbands. Now I know I had twelve when I left my wife, so askt of Friday – who walks as though ground was air under him – what had become of all my gear. At this he wept for ten minutes (over mine only towel) and prayed me to send him to prison since I had blackt his face thus far. At this I was very wrath and said that no one had called him thief, but that I wanted my shirts again. Thereat he wept more than before, till I kickt him out of the room and shut the door. When next I opened it after smoking a pipe to consider how I should do, I found seven of my shirts – three that had been worn and four that were new – lying in a heap on the threshold. They smelt terribly of cocoanut oil and bad tobacco, and were marked and stained with all manner of stuffs. But Friday knew nothing of them at all, save that I was his father and mother and had suspected him of robbery. He wept all day by fits and starts, and I gave him four annas to quiet him. But this did not amend the quality of my meals. Dined again at the Club where Cadwallader Jones (who, methinks still, cheated me in the matter of that horse) called me a “sick dove” and clapt me on the back with his hand. Mrs. Jones returns to the island shortly, I would I were Jones, or at least that Mrs. Crusoe was here. To bed thinking sorrowfully how I have done no work at all this week by reason of the pestilent Friday, who was more in my mind than anything else. Lord! Lord! and I had a thousand and one matters to finish and furbish up ere the Courts opened! Yet I will give him one day more of grace, and

THE TRAGEDY OF CRUSOE, C.S.

then – it is surely cool enough for Mrs. Crusoe. Stoppt the punkah to see if this were so, and went off in a strong sweating till dawn.

Saturday.—Friday is again drunk nor was there any sign at all of breakfast. I eat sparingly of my sardines, with a cheese scoop, the rest of the table gear being all filthy with the remains of some feast. I found them in the pantry and judge that Friday hath been entertaining his friends. I have telegraphed for Mrs. Crusoe, and till she come must make shift to live on sardines.

Jacob Cavendish, M.A.

- ¹ ‘Covenanted Servant’, i.e., a holder of one of the higher posts in the Indian Civil Service. The rank was then exclusively British.
- ² His statement is reported in a letter from RK’s bibliographer, Flora Livingston, to Mrs Kipling, 1 October 1936 (Kipling Papers, University of Sussex, KP 25/53). Since RK resented the intrusions of bibliographers and other searchers after his early work, it is more than likely that he meant his statement to create uncertainty.
- ³ Mrs Poyser’s remark, in George Eliot, *Adam Bede*.
- ⁴ ‘What?’ ‘Sahib,’ says he, ‘Worcestershire sauce, cooking oil, new gravel for the stable, mustard seeds, fruit preserves.’
- ⁵ Acts 27:17: ‘they used helps, undergirding the ship’.