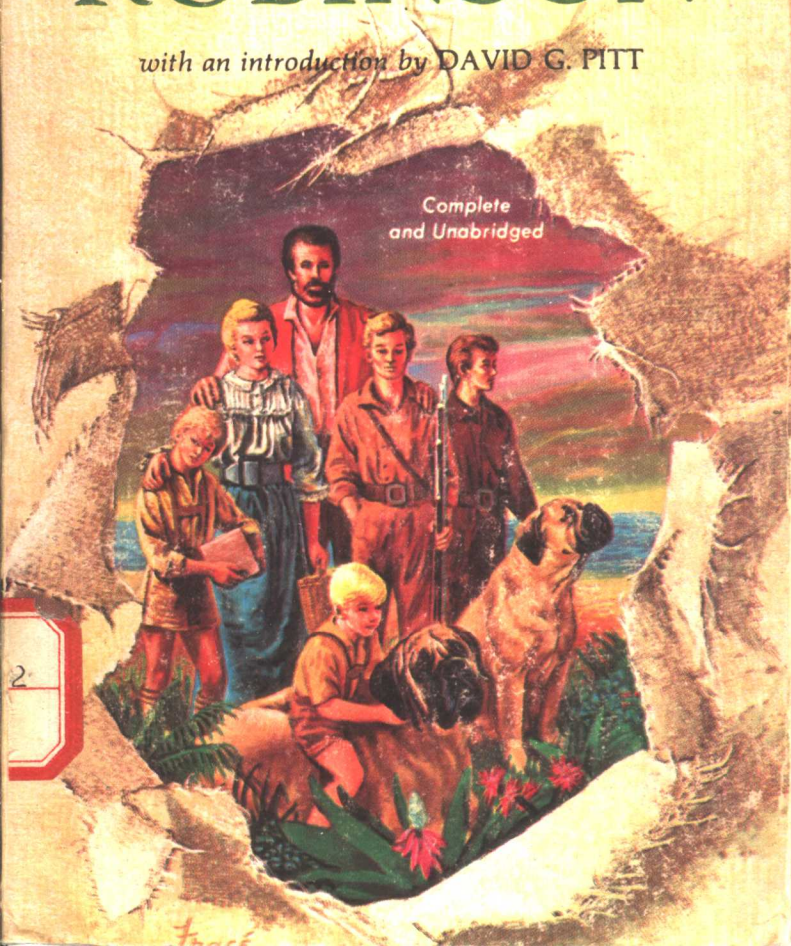


JOHANN WYSS
THE
Swiss Family
ROBINSON

with an introduction by DAVID G. PITT

Complete
and Unabridged



*The
Swiss Family*
ROBINSON

by
JOHANN WYSS

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The Swiss Family ROBINSON



JOHANN WYSS

Introduction

When Daniel Defoe wrote and published his famous *Robinson Crusoe* in 1719, he could not have foreseen, nor even have guessed at, the popularity that his book, and also its theme, would achieve and maintain for generations to come. Its theme, as everyone knows, is the life and adventures of a castaway on an uninhabited island, where only his ingenuity, stamina, and hard work, aided by Providence, nature, and the few implements he is able to bring ashore with him, constitute his means of survival. But survive he does, and remains in his lonely refuge to prove that man by using his natural endowments and little else can get along satisfactorily, if not elegantly. Defoe himself got the idea for his fictional history from the actual adventures of Alexander Selkirk, a Scottish sailor, who was marooned on the island of Juan Fernandez from September, 1704 to January, 1709, and survived. But Defoe's fiction goes far beyond Selkirk's history.

Without going into the reasons here, we can safely say that probably no other book established such a popular

literary vogue as did *Robinson Crusoe*. It was translated, copied, adapted, and imitated by innumerable authors not only in England, but in many other countries as well. So many "Robinsons" appeared—though not all using the name—that the French found it convenient to coin a term to describe them: *Robinsonnades*. Among them are a few that achieved the qualities of a classic, especially if we include the quality of perennial appeal. *The Swiss Family Robinson* by Johann Wyss is certainly one of these. It is, of course, very different in many ways from its great prototype. For example, the later book is the story of a castaway family—a clergyman, his wife, and their four sons—rather than of one man, who, it is true, later acquired a companion. Moreover, the Swiss Robinsons were much better supplied with implements and other appurtenances of civilization than was Crusoe. Besides this, *The Swiss Family Robinson* seems to try more consciously to inculcate moral and religious lessons, although this aim, too, was not ignored by Defoe.

Nevertheless, the adventures and exploits of the Swiss Robinsons have their own special appeal and interest. The very number of reprints that the book has seen in the past century and a half is clearly indicative of this. The reason for such longevity is obvious: the complete imaginative acceptance that the book compels despite its sheer improbability. All kinds of improbable, indeed impossible, things happen; all sorts of geographical and other natural facts are flouted. Yet the storytelling is such that no one, even when he is old enough to observe such things, ever stops to question or object. The story simply captures us—as every good story should—and we cannot escape until it is finished. It carries us along at irresistible speed, from shipwreck to island, from improvised tent to treetop house, from tapping a rubber tree to finding a salt mine, from snakes that swallow donkeys to ostriches that one can ride on, and so on from one incredible escapade, discovery, or spectacle to another. Indeed, at the end we are loath to leave, almost ready to accept Pastor Robinson's invitation, in the closing lines of his account, to come and join them in their "Happy Island."

The history of the book, how it came to be written as we know it, is almost as fascinating as the book itself. Its original creator was a German-speaking Swiss clergyman, chaplain to the Swiss army, by the name of Johann David Rudolf Wyss, who was born in 1749 and died in 1818. Little more is known of him, except that he had several sons for whom he was fond of composing stories. Among these stories were the adventures of a Swiss pastor and his family who were cast away on a tropical island; and among the sons was another Johann, born in 1781, who wrote down, revised, and published his father's tale, the first half in 1812 and the second a year later. It is this second Johann Wyss, whose middle name was also Rudolf, who usually gets the credit for this great "Robinsonnade." Actually, he deserves much of it, because had it not been for his enterprise in preparing the book for publication and for rewriting, perhaps *writing*, parts of it, the world would not have had it at all.

By profession, Johann Wyss the Younger was a professor of philosophy, and for some years was both a professor and librarian at the University of Berne in Switzerland. *The Swiss Family Robinson*, though the work for which he is best known, is by no means his only claim to fame, particularly in his native Switzerland. For he was also the author of the Swiss National Anthem: *Rufst du, mein Vaterland*. Besides, he was the collector and editor of several volumes of Swiss tales and folklore: *Idyls and Tales from the Swiss* (1815-22), *Travels in the Bernese Uplands* and the fifteen-volume *Die Alpenrose* (1811-30). He died in Berne in 1830.

But the work of Johann Wyss the Younger on *The Swiss Family Robinson* does not end the history of its origin as we know the book. Shortly after it appeared, a Frenchwoman, Baroness de Montholieu, was given permission by Wyss to rewrite parts of the story, revise and enlarge it, and to change the original ending. This she did with such enthusiasm that her new version filled no fewer than five volumes, which were published between 1824 and 1826. Among her most notable additions was the donkey, already mentioned, who was swallowed by a huge snake.

The book had already been translated and published in

English in 1814 by William Godwin, philosopher and novelist, and father-in-law to the poet Shelley, who is thought to have helped him in the work of translation. Another Englishman, W. H. G. Kingston, was next to take the book in hand, and in 1849 produced a further modified, and this time abbreviated, version of the Wyss-Montholieu text. This became the standard English version, although an edition of the original Montholieu text was later published by Mrs. H. B. Paull. There have been other translations and editions, but these are all very close either to Kingston's or Paull's text. Perhaps no work of comparable significance—at least in modern times—has had a more curious and interesting history.

This then is the book before us, and however it came into being, we are, surely, all very glad that it did.

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January, 1963

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I Shipwrecked and Alone

For many days we had been tempest-tossed. Six times had the darkness closed over a wild and terrific scene, and returning light as often brought but renewed distress, for the raging storm increased in fury until on the seventh day all hope was lost.

We were driven completely out of our course; no conjecture could be formed as to our whereabouts. The crew had lost heart and were utterly exhausted by incessant labor.

The riven masts had gone by the board, leaks had been sprung in every direction, and the water, which rushed in, gained upon us rapidly.

Instead of reckless oaths, the seamen now uttered frantic cries to God for mercy, mingled with strange and often ludicrous vows, to be performed should deliverance be granted.

Every man on board alternately commended his soul to his Creator, and strove to bethink himself of some means of saving his life.

My heart sank as I looked round upon my family in the midst of these horrors. Our four young sons were overpowered by terror. "Dear children," said I, "if the Lord will, He can save us even from this fearful peril; if not, let us calmly yield our lives into His hand, and think of the joy and blessedness of finding ourselves forever and ever united in that happy home above."

At these words my weeping wife looked bravely up, and, as the boys clustered round her, she began to cheer and encourage them with calm and loving words. I rejoiced to see

her fortitude, though my heart was ready to break as I gazed on my dear ones.

We knelt down together, one after another praying with deep earnestness and emotion. Fritz, in particular, besought help and deliverance for his dear parents and brothers, as though quite forgetting himself.

Our hearts were soothed by the never-failing comfort of childlike, confiding prayer, and the horror of our situation seemed less overwhelming. "Ah," thought I, "the Lord will hear our prayer! He will help us."

Amid the roar of the thundering waves I suddenly heard the cry of "Land, land!" while at the same instant the ship struck with a frightful shock, which threw everyone to the deck and seemed to threaten her immediate destruction.

Dreadful sounds betokened the breaking up of the ship, and the roaring waters poured in on all sides:

Then the voice of the captain was heard above the tumult shouting, "Lower away the boats! We are lost!"

"Lost!" I exclaimed, and the word went like a dagger to my heart; but seeing my children's terror renewed, I composed myself, calling out cheerfully, "Take courage, my boys! We are all abovewater yet. There is the land not far off; let us do our best to reach it. You know God helps those that help themselves!" With that, I left them and went on deck. What was my horror when through the foam and spray I beheld the only remaining boat leave the ship, the last of the seamen spring into her and push off, regardless of my cries and entreaties that we might be allowed to share their slender chance of preserving their lives. My voice was drowned in the howling of the blast; and even had the crew wished it, the return of the boat was impossible.

Casting my eyes despairingly around, I became gradually aware that our position was by no means hopeless, inasmuch as the stern of the ship containing our cabin was jammed between two high rocks, and was partly raised from among the breakers which dashed the fore part to pieces. As the clouds of mist and rain drove past, I could make out, through rents in the vaporous curtain, a line of

rocky coast, and rugged as it was, my heart bounded toward it as a sign of help in the hour of need. Yet the sense of our lonely and forsaken condition weighed heavily upon me as I returned to my family, constraining myself to say with a smile, "Courage, dear ones! Although our good ship will never sail more, she is so placed that our cabin will remain abovewater, and tomorrow, if the wind and waves abate, I see no reason why we should not be able to get ashore."

These few words had an immediate effect on the spirits of my children, who at once regarded our problematical chance of escaping as a happy certainty, and began to enjoy the relief from the violent pitching and rolling of the vessel.

My wife, however, perceived my distress and anxiety, in spite of my forced composure, and I made her comprehend our real situation, greatly fearing the effect of the intelligence on her nerves. Not for a moment did her courage and trust in Providence forsake her, and on seeing this my fortitude revived.

"We must find some food, and take a good supper," said she, "it will never do to grow faint by fasting too long. We shall require our utmost strength tomorrow."

Night drew on apace, the storm was as fierce as ever, and at intervals we were startled by crashes announcing further damage to our unfortunate ship.

"God will help us soon now, won't He, father?" said my youngest child.

"You silly little thing," said Fritz, my eldest son, sharply, "don't you know that we must not settle what God is to do for us? We must have patience and wait His time."

"Very well said, had it been said kindly, Fritz, my boy. You too often speak harshly to your brothers, although you may not mean to do so."

A good meal being now ready, my youngsters ate heartily, and retiring to rest were speedily fast asleep. Fritz, who was of an age to be aware of the real danger we were in, kept watch with us. After a long silence, "Father," said he, "don't you think we might contrive swimming belts

for mother and the boys? With those we might all escape to land, for you and I can swim."

"Your idea is so good," answered I, "that I shall arrange something at once, in case of an accident during the night."

We immediately searched about for what would answer the purpose, and fortunately got hold of a number of empty flasks and tin canisters, which we connected two and two together so as to form floats sufficiently buoyant to support a person in the water, and my wife and young sons each willingly put one on. I then provided myself with matches, knives, cord, and other portable articles, trusting that, should the vessel go to pieces before daylight, we might gain the shore not wholly destitute.

Fritz, as well as his brothers, now slept soundly. Throughout the night my wife and I maintained our prayerful watch, dreading at every fresh sound some fatal change in the position of the wreck.

At length the faint dawn of day appeared, the long, weary night was over, and with thankful hearts we perceived that the gale had begun to moderate; blue sky was seen above us, and the lovely hues of sunrise adorned the eastern horizon.

I aroused the boys, and we assembled on the remaining portion of the deck, when they, to their surprise, discovered that no one else was on board.

"Hullo, papa! What has become of everybody? Are the sailors gone? Have they taken away the boats? Oh, papa! Why did they leave us behind? What can we do by ourselves?"

"My good children," I replied, "we must not despair, although we seem deserted. See how those on whose skill and good faith we depended have left us cruelly to our fate in the hour of danger. God will never do so. He has not forsaken us, and we will trust Him still. Only let us bestir ourselves, and each cheerily do his best. Who has anything to propose?"

"The sea will soon be calm enough for swimming," said Fritz.

"And that would be all very fine for you," exclaimed

Ernest, "but think of mother and the rest of us! Why not build a raft and all get on shore together?"

"We should find it difficult, I think, to make a raft that would carry us safe to shore. However, we must contrive something, and first let each try to procure what will be of most use to us."

Away we all went to see what was to be found, I myself proceeding to examine, as of great consequence, the supplies of provisions and fresh water within our reach.

My wife took her youngest son, Franz, to help her to feed the unfortunate animals on board, who were in a pitiful plight, having been neglected for several days.

Fritz hastened to the arms chest, Ernest to look for tools: and Jack went toward the captain's cabin, the door of which he no sooner opened than out sprang two splendid large dogs, who testified their extreme delight and gratitude by such tremendous bounds that they knocked their little deliverer completely head over heels, frightening him nearly out of his wits. Jack did not long yield to either fear or anger; he presently recovered himself. The dogs seemed to ask pardon by vehemently licking his face and hands, and so, seizing the larger by the ears, he jumped on his back, and, to my great amusement, coolly rode to meet me as I came up the hatchway.

When we reassembled in the cabin we all displayed our treasures.

Fritz brought a couple of guns, shot belt, powder flasks, and plenty of bullets.

Ernest produced a cap full of nails, an ax, and a hammer, while pincers, chisels, and augers stuck out of all his pockets.

Little Franz carried a box, and eagerly began to show us the "nice sharp little hooks" it contained. "Well done, Franz!" cried I. "These fishhooks, which you, the youngest, have found, may contribute more than anything else in the ship to save our lives by procuring food for us. Fritz and Ernest, you have chosen well."

"Will you praise me too?" said my dear wife. "I have nothing to show, but I can give you good news. Some use-

ful animals are still alive: a cow, a donkey, two goats, six sheep, a ram, and a fine sow. I was but just in time to save their lives by taking food to them."

"All these things are excellent indeed," said I, "but my friend Jack here has presented me with a couple of huge, hungry, useless dogs, who will eat more than any of us."

"Oh, papa, they will be of use! Why, they will help us to hunt when we get on shore!"

"No doubt they will, if ever we do get on shore, Jack; but I must say I don't know how it is to be done."

"Can't we each get into a big tub, and float there?" returned he. "I have often sailed splendidly like that, round the pond at home."

"My child, you have hit on a capital idea," cried I. "Now, Ernest, let me have your tools—hammers, nails, saws, augers, and ax; and then make haste to collect any tubs you can find!"

We very soon found four large casks, made of sound wood and strongly bound with iron hoops; they were floating with many other things in the water in the hold, but we managed to fish them out and drag them to a suitable place for launching. They were exactly what I wanted, and I succeeded in sawing them across the middle. Hard work it was, and we were glad enough to stop and refresh ourselves with wine and biscuits.

My eight tubs now stood ranged in a row near the water's edge, and I looked at them with great satisfaction; to my surprise, my wife did not seem to share my pleasure!

"I shall never," said she, "muster courage to get into one of these!"

"Do not be too sure of that, dear wife; when you see my contrivance completed, you will perhaps prefer it to this immovable wreck."

I next procured a long, thin plank, on which my tubs could be fixed, and the two ends of this I bent upward so as to form a keel. Other two planks were nailed along the sides of the tubs; they also being flexible, were brought to a point at each end, and all firmly secured and nailed together. I felt satisfied that in smooth water this craft

would be perfectly trustworthy. But when we thought all was ready for the launch we found, to our dismay, that the grand contrivance was so heavy and clumsy, that even our united efforts could not move it an inch.

"I must have a lever," cried I. "Run and fetch the capstan bar!"

Fritz quickly brought one, and, having formed rollers by cutting up a long spar, I raised the fore part of my boat with the bar, and my sons placed a roller under it.

"How is it, father," inquired Ernest, "that with that thing you alone can do more than all of us together?"

I explained, as well as I could in a hurry, the principle of the lever; and promised to have a long talk on the subject of mechanics, should we have a future opportunity.

I now made fast a long rope to the stern of our boat, attaching the other end to a beam; then placing a second and third roller under it, we once more began to push, this time with success, and soon our gallant craft was safely launched: so swiftly indeed did she glide into the water that, but for the rope, she would have passed beyond our reach. The boys wished to jump in directly; but, alas, she leaned so much on one side that they could not venture to do so.

Some heavy things being thrown in, however, the boat righted itself by degrees, and the boys were so delighted that they struggled which should first leap in to have the fun of sitting down in the tubs. But it was plain to me at once that something more was required to make her perfectly safe, so I contrived outriggers to preserve the balance, by nailing long poles across at the stem and stern, and fixing at the end of each empty brandy casks.

Then the boat appearing steady, I got in; and turning it toward the most open side of the wreck, I cut and cleared away obstructions, so as to leave a free passage for our departure, and the boys brought oars to be ready for the voyage. This important undertaking we were forced to postpone until the next day, as it was by this time far too late to attempt it. It was not pleasant to have to spend another night in so precarious a situation; but yielding to necessity,

we sat down to enjoy a comfortable supper, for during our exciting and incessant work all day we had taken nothing but an occasional biscuit and a little wine.

We prepared for rest in a much happier frame of mind than on the preceding day, but I did not forget the possibility of a renewed storm, and therefore made everyone put on the belts as before; then retiring to our berths, peaceful sleep prepared us all for the exertions of the coming day.