

Defoe Daniel

The True-Born Englishman



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The True-Born Englishman A Satire

Statuimus pacem, et securitatem et concordiam judicum et justiciam inter Anglos et Normannos, Francos et Britanes, Walliæ, et Cornubiæ, Pictos et Scotos, Albaniam, similiter inter Francos et insulanos provincias et patrias, quæ pertinent ad coronam nostram, et inter omnes nobis subjectos firmiter et inviolabiliter observare.

Charta Regis Gullielmi Conquistoris de Pacis Publica, cap. i.

AN EXPLANATORY PREFACE

It is not that I see any reason to alter my opinion in any thing I have writ, which occasions this epistle; but I find it necessary for the satisfaction of some persons of honour, as well as wit, to pass a short explication upon it; and tell the world what I mean, or rather, what I do not mean, in some things wherein I find I am liable to be misunderstood.

I confess myself something surpris'd to hear that I am taxed with bewraying my own nest, and abusing our nation, by discovering the meanness of our original, in order to make the English contemptible abroad and at home; in which, I think, they are mistaken: for why should not our neighbours be as good as we to derive from? And I must add, that had we been an unmix'd nation, I am of opinion it had been to our disadvantage: for to go no farther, we have three nations about us as clear from mixtures of blood as any in the world, and I know not which of them I could wish ourselves to be like; I mean the Scots, the Welsh, and the Irish; and if I were to write a reverse to the Satire, I would examine all the nations of Europe, and prove, that those nations which are most mix'd, are the best, and have least of barbarism and brutality among them; and abundance of reasons might be given for it, too long to bring into a Preface.

But I give this hint, to let the world know, that I am far from thinking, 'tis a Satire upon the English nation, to tell them, they are derived from all the nations under heaven; that is, from several nations. Nor is it meant to undervalue the original of the English, for we see no reason to like them worse, being the relicts of Romans, Danes, Saxons and Normans, than we should have done if they had remain'd Britons, that is, than if they had been all Welshmen.

But the intent of the Satire is pointed at the vanity of those who talk of their antiquity, and value themselves upon their pedigree, their ancient families, and being true-born; whereas 'tis impossible we should be true-born: and if we could, should have lost by the bargain.

These sort of people, who call themselves true-born, and tell long stories of their families, and like a nobleman of Venice, think a foreigner ought not to walk on the same side of the street with them, are own'd to be meant in this Satire. What they would infer from their long original, I know not, nor is it easy to make out whether they are the better or the worse for their ancestors: our English nation may value themselves for their wit, wealth and courage, and I believe few nations will dispute it with them; but for long originals, and ancient true-born families of English, I would advise them to wave the discourse. A true Englishman is one that deserves a character, and I have nowhere lessened him, that I know of; but as for a true-born Englishman, I confess I do not understand him.

From hence I only infer, that an Englishman, of all men, ought not to despise foreigners as such, and I think the inference is just, since what they are to-day, we were yesterday, and to-morrow they will be like us. If foreigners misbehave in their several stations and employments, I have nothing to do with that; the laws are open to punish them equally with natives, and let them have no favour.

But when I see the town full of lampoons and invectives against Dutchmen, only because they are foreigners, and the king reproached and insulted by insolent pedants, and ballad-making poets, for employing foreigners, and for being a foreigner himself, I confess myself moved by it to remind our nation of their own original, thereby to let them see what a banter is put upon ourselves in it; since speaking of Englishmen *ab origine*, we are really all foreigners ourselves.

I could go on to prove it is also impolitic in us to discourage foreigners; since it is easy to make it appear that the multitudes of foreign nations who have taken sanctuary here, have been the greatest additions to the wealth and strength of the nation; the essential whereof is the number of its inhabitants; nor would this nation ever have arrived to the degree of wealth and glory it now boasts

of, if the addition of foreign nations, both as to manufactures and arms, had not been helpful to it. This is so plain, that he who is ignorant of it, is too dull to be talked with.

The Satire therefore I must allow to be just, till I am otherwise convinced; because nothing can be more ridiculous than to hear our people boast of that antiquity, which if it had been true, would have left us in so much worse a condition than we are in now: whereas we ought rather to boast among our neighbours, that we are part of themselves, of the same original as they, but bettered by our climate, and like our language and manufactures, derived from them, and improved by us to a perfection greater than they can pretend to.

This we might have valued ourselves upon without vanity; but to disown our descent from them, talk big of our ancient families, and long originals, and stand at a distance from foreigners, like the enthusiast in religion, with a Stand off, I am more holy than thou: this is a thing so ridiculous, in a nation derived from foreigners, as we are, that I could not but attack them as I have done.

And whereas I am threatened to be called to a public account for this freedom; and the publisher of this has been newspapered into gaol already for it; tho' I see nothing in it for which the government can be displeas'd; yet if at the same time those people who with an unlimited arrogance in print, every day affront the king, prescribe the parliament, and lampoon the government, may be either punished or restrained, I am content to stand and fall by the public justice of my native country, which I am not sensible I have anywhere injured.

Nor would I be misunderstood concerning the clergy; with whom, if I have taken any license more than becomes a Satire, I question not but those gentlemen, who are men of letters, are also men of so much candor, as to allow me a loose at the crimes of the guilty, without thinking the whole profession lashed who are innocent. I profess to have very mean thoughts of those gentlemen who have deserted their own principles, and exposed even their morals as well as loyalty; but not at all to think it affects any but such as are concerned in the fact.

Nor would I be misrepresented as to the ingratitude of the English to the king and his friends; as if I meant the English as a nation, are so. The contrary is so apparent, that I would hope it should not be suggested of me: and, therefore when I have brought in Britannia speaking of the king, I suppose her to be the representative or mouth of the nation, as a body. But if I say we are full of such who daily affront the king, and abuse his friends; who print scurrilous pamphlets, virulent lampoons, and reproachful public banter, against both the king's person and his government; I say nothing but what is too true; and that the Satire is directed at such, I freely own; and cannot say, but I should think it very hard to be censured for this Satire, while such remain unquestioned and tacitly approved. That I can mean none but such, is plain from these few lines,

Ye heavens regard! Almighty Jove, look down,
And view thy injured monarch on the throne.
On their ungrateful heads due vengeance take,
Who sought his aid, and then his part forsake.

If I have fallen rudely upon our vices, I hope none but the vicious will be angry. As for writing for interest, I disown it; I have neither place, nor pension, nor prospect; nor seek none, nor will have none: if matter of fact justifies the truth of the crimes, the Satire is just. As to the poetic liberties, I hope the crime is pardonable; I am content to be stoned, provided none will attack me but the innocent.

If my countrymen would take the hint, and grow better natured from my ill-natured poem as some call it; I would say this of it, that though it is far from the best Satire that ever was wrote, it would do the most good that ever Satire did.

And yet I am ready to ask pardon of some gentlemen too; who though they are Englishmen, have good nature enough to see themselves reprov'd, and can hear it. These are gentlemen in a true

sense, that can bare to be told of their *faux pas*, and not abuse the reprover. To such I must say, this is no Satire; they are exceptions to the general rule; and I value my performance from their generous approbation, more than I can from any opinion I have of its worth.

The hasty errors of my verse I made my excuse for before; and since the time I have been upon it has been but little, and my leisure less, I have all along strove rather to make the thoughts explicit, than the poem correct. However, I have mended some faults in this edition, and the rest must be placed to my account.

As to answers, banter, true English Billingsgate, I expect them till nobody will buy, and then the shop will be shut. Had I wrote it for the gain of the press, I should have been concerned at its being printed again, and again, by pirates, as they call them, and paragraph-men; but would they but do it justice, and print it true, according to the copy, they are welcome to sell it for a penny, if they please.

The pence, indeed, is the end of their works. I will engage if nobody will buy, nobody will write: and not a patriot poet of them all, now will in defence of his native country, which I have abused, they say, print an answer to it, and give it about for God's sake.

PREFACE

The end of satire is reformation: and the author, though he doubt the work of conversion is at a general stop, has put his hand in the plough. I expect a storm of ill language from the fury of the town. And especially from those whose English talent it is to rail: and, without being taken for a conjuror, I may venture to foretel, that I shall be cavilled at about my mean style, rough verse, and incorrect language, things I indeed might have taken more care in. But the book is printed; and though I see some faults, it is too late to mend them. And this is all I think needful to say to them.

Possibly somebody may take me for a Dutchman; in which they are mistaken: but I am one that would be glad to see Englishmen behave themselves better to strangers, and to governors also, that one might not be reproached in foreign countries for belonging to a nation that wants manners.

I assure you, gentlemen, strangers use us better abroad; and we can give no reason but our ill-nature for the contrary here.

Methinks an Englishman who is so proud of being called a good fellow, should be civil. And it cannot be denied, but we are, in many cases, and particularly to strangers, the most churlish people alive.

As to vices, who can dispute our intemperance, while an honest drunken fellow is a character in a man's praise? All our reformations are banTERS, and will be so till our magistrates and gentry reform themselves, by way of example; then, and not till then, they may be expected to punish others without blushing.

As to our ingratitude, I desire to be understood of that particular people, who pretending to be Protestants, have all along endeavoured to reduce the liberties and religion of this nation into the hands of King James and his Popish powers: together with such who enjoy the peace and protection of the present government, and yet abuse and affront the king who procured it, and openly profess their uneasiness under him: these, by whatsoever names or titles they are dignified or distinguished, are the people aimed at; nor do I disown, but that it is so much the temper of an Englishman to abuse his benefactor, that I could be glad to see it rectified.

They who think I have been guilty of any error, in exposing the crimes of my own countrymen to themselves, may, among many honest instances of the like nature, find the same thing in Mr. Cowley, in his imitation of the second Olympic Ode of Pindar; his words are these: —

But in this thankless world, the givers
Are envied even by the receivers.
'Tis now the cheap and frugal fashion,
Rather to hide than pay an obligation.
Nay, 'tis much worse than so;
It now an artifice doth grow,
Wrongs and outrages they do,
Lest men should think we owe.

THE INTRODUCTION

Speak, Satire, for there's none can tell like thee,
Whether 'tis folly, pride, or knavery,
That makes this discontented land appear
Less happy now in times of peace, than war:
Why civil feuds disturb the nation more,
Than all our bloody wars have done before.

Fools out of favour grudge at knaves in place,
And men are always honest in disgrace:
The court preferments make men knaves in course:
But they which wou'd be in them wou'd be worse.
'Tis not at foreigners that we repine,
Wou'd foreigners their perquisites resign:
The grand contention's plainly to be seen,
To get some men put out, and some put in.
For this our Senators make long harangues.
And florid Ministers whet their polish'd tongues.
Statesmen are always sick of one disease;
And a good pension gives them present ease.
That's the specific makes them all content
With any King and any government.
Good patriots at court abuses rail,
And all the nation's grievances bewail:
But when the sov'reign balsam's once apply'd,
The zealot never fails to change his side;
And when he must the golden key resign,
The railing spirit comes about again.

Who shall this bubbld nation disabuse,
While they their own felicities refuse?
Who at the wars have made such mighty pother,
And now are falling out with one another:
With needless fears the jealous nations fill,
And always have been sav'd against their will:
Who fifty millions sterling have disburs'd
To be with peace, and too much plenty, curs'd;
Who their old monarch eagerly undo,
And yet uneasily obey the new.
Search, Satire, search; a deep incision make:
The poison's strong, the antidote's too weak.
'Tis pointed truth must manage this dispute,
And down-right English, Englishmen confute.

Whet thy just anger at the nation's pride;
And with keen phrase repel the vicious tide,

To Englishmen their own beginnings show,
And ask them, why they slight their neighbours so:
Go back to elder times, and ages past,
And nations into long oblivion cast;
To elder Britain's youthful days retire,
And there for true-born Englishmen inquire,
Britannia freely will disown the name,
And hardly knows herself from whence they came;
Wonders that they of all men should pretend
To birth, and blood, and for a name contend.
Go back to causes where our follies dwell,
And fetch the dark original from hell:
Speak, Satire, for there's none like thee can tell.

THE TRUE-BORN ENGLISHMAN

PART I

Wherever God erects a house of prayer,
The Devil always builds a chapel there:
And 'twill be found upon examination,
The latter has the largest congregation:
For ever since he first debauch'd the mind,
He made a perfect conquest of mankind.
With uniformity of service, he
Reigns with general aristocracy.
No non-conforming sects disturb his reign,
For of his yoke, there's very few complain.
He knows the genius and the inclination,
And matches proper sins for ev'ry nation.
He needs no standing army government;
He always rules us by our own consent:
His laws are easy, and his gentle sway

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