

DEFOE DANIEL

EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS
IS NOBODY'S BUSINESS

Daniel Defoe

**Everybody's Business
Is Nobody's Business**

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Daniel Defoe
Everybody's Business Is Nobody's
Business / Or, Private Abuses, Public
Grievances; Exemplified in the Pride,
Insolence, and Exorbitant Wages of
Our Women, Servants, Footmen, &c

THE PREFACE

Since this little book appeared in print, it has had no less than three answers, and fresh attacks are daily expected from the powers of Grub-street; but should threescore antagonists more arise, unless they say more to the purpose than the forementioned, they shall not tempt me to reply.

Nor shall I engage in a paper war, but leave my book to answer for itself, having advanced nothing therein but evident truths, and incontestible matters of fact.

The general objection is against my style; I do not set up for an author, but write only to be understood, no matter how plain.

As my intentions are good, so have they had the good fortune to meet with approbation from the sober and substantial part of mankind; as for the vicious and vagabond, their ill-will is my ambition.

It is with uncommon satisfaction I see the magistracy begin to put the laws against vagabonds in force with the utmost vigour, a great many of those vermin, the japanners, having lately been taken up and sent to the several work-houses in and about this city; and indeed high time, for they grow every day more and more pernicious.

My project for putting watchmen under commissioners, will, I hope, be put in practice; for it is scarce safe to go by water unless you know your man.

As for the maid-servants, if I undervalue myself to take notice of them, as they are pleased to say, it is because they overvalue themselves so much they ought to be taken notice of.

This makes the guilty take my subject by the wrong end, but any impartial reader may find, I write not against servants, but bad servants; not against wages, but exorbitant wages, and am entirely of the poet's opinion,

The good should meet with favour and applause,
The wicked be restrain'd by wholesome laws.

The reason why I did not publish this book till the end of the last sessions of parliament was, because I did not care to interfere with more momentous affairs; but leave it to the consideration of that august body during this recess, against the next sessions, when I shall exhibit another complaint against a growing abuse, for which I doubt not but to receive their approbation and the thanks of all honest men.

EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS IS NOBODY'S BUSINESS

This is a proverb so common in everybody's mouth, that I wonder nobody has yet thought it worth while to draw proper inferences from it, and expose those little abuses, which, though they seem trifling, and as it were scarce worth consideration, yet, by insensible degrees, they may become of injurious consequence to the public; like some diseases, whose first symptoms are only trifling disorders, but by continuance and progression, their last periods terminate in the destruction of the whole human fabric.

In contradiction therefore to this general rule, and out of sincere love and well meaning to the public, give me leave to enumerate the abuses insensibly crept in among us, and the inconveniences daily arising from the insolence and intrigues of our servant-wenches, who, by their caballing together, have made their party so considerable, that everybody cries out against them; and yet, to verify the proverb, nobody has thought of, or at least proposed a remedy, although such an undertaking, mean as it seems to be, I hope will one day be thought worthy the consideration of our king, lords, and commons.

Women servants are now so scarce, that from thirty and forty shillings a year, their wages are increased of late to six, seven, nay, eight pounds per annum, and upwards; insomuch that an ordinary tradesman cannot well keep one; but his wife, who might be useful in his shop or business, must do the drudgery of household affairs; and all this because our servant-wenches are so puffed up with pride nowadays, that they never think they go fine enough: it is a hard matter to know the mistress from the maid by their dress; nay, very often the maid shall be much the finer of the two. Our woollen manufacture suffers much by this, for nothing but silks and satins will go down with our kitchen-wenches; to support which intolerable pride, they have insensibly raised their wages to such a height as was never known in any age or nation but this.

Let us trace this from the beginning, and suppose a person has a servant-maid sent him out of the country, at fifty shillings, or three pounds a year. The girl has scarce been a week, nay, a day in her service, but a committee of servant-wenches are appointed to examine her, who advise her to raise her wages, or give warning; to encourage her to which, the herb-woman, or chandler-woman, or some other old intelligencer, provides her a place of four or five pounds a year; this sets madam cock-a-hoop, and she thinks of nothing now but vails and high wages, and so gives warning from place to place, till she has got her wages up to the tip-top.

Her neat's leathern shoes are now transformed into laced ones with high heels; her yarn stockings are turned into fine woollen ones, with silk clocks; and her high wooden pattens are kicked away for leathern clogs; she must have a hoop too, as well as her mistress; and her poor scanty linsey-woolsey petticoat is changed into a good silk one, for four or five yards wide at the least. Not to carry the description farther, in short, plain country Joan is now turned into a fine London madam, can drink tea, take snuff, and carry herself as high as the best.

If she be tolerably handsome, and has any share of cunning, the apprentice or her master's son is enticed away and ruined by her. Thus many good families are impoverished and disgraced by these pert sluts, who, taking the advantage of a young man's simplicity and unruly desires, draw many heedless youths, nay, some of good estates, into their snares; and of this we have but too many instances.

Some more artful shall conceal their condition, and palm themselves off on young fellows for gentlewomen and great fortunes. How many families have been ruined by these ladies? when the father or master of the family, preferring the flirting airs of a young prinked up strumpet, to the artless sincerity of a plain, grave, and good wife, has given his desires a loose, and destroyed soul, body, family, and estate. But they are very favourable if they wheedle nobody into matrimony, but

only make a present of a small live creature, no bigger than a bastard, to some of the family, no matter who gets it; when a child is born it must be kept.

Our sessions' papers of late are crowded with instances of servant-maids robbing their places, this can be only attributed to their devilish pride; for their whole inquiry nowadays is, how little they shall do, how much they shall have.

But all this while they make so little reserve, that if they fall sick the parish must keep them, if they are out of place, they must prostitute their bodies, or starve; so that from clopping and changing, they generally proceed to whoring and thieving, and this is the reason why our streets swarm with strumpets.

Thus many of them rove from place to place, from bawdy-house to service, and from service to bawdy-house again, ever unsettled and never easy, nothing being more common than to find these creatures one week in a good family, and the next in a brothel. This amphibious life makes them fit for neither, for if the bawd uses them ill, away they trip to service, and if the mistress gives them a wry word, whip they are at a bawdy-house again, so that in effect they neither make good whores nor good servants.

Those who are not thus slippery in the tail, are light of finger; and of these the most pernicious are those who beggar you inchmeal. If a maid is a downright thief she strips you, it once, and you know your loss; but these retail pilferers waste you insensibly, and though you hardly miss it, yet your substance shall decay to such a degree, that you must have a very good bottom indeed not to feel the ill effects of such moths in your family.

Tea, sugar, wine, &c., or any such trifling commodities, are reckoned no thefts, if they do not directly take your pewter from your shelf, or your linen from your drawers, they are very honest: What harm is there, say they, in cribbing a little matter for a junket, a merry bout or so? Nay, there are those that when they are sent to market for one joint of meat, shall take up two on their master's account, and leave one by the way, for some of these maids are mighty charitable, and can make a shift to maintain a small family with what they can purloin from their masters and mistresses.

If you send them with ready money, they turn factors, and take threepence or fourpence in the shilling brokerage. And here let me take notice of one very heinous abuse, not to say petty felony, which is practised in most of the great families about town, which is, when the tradesman gives the house-keeper or other commanding servant a penny or twopence in the shilling, or so much in the pound, for everything they send in, and which, from thence, is called poundage.

This, in my opinion, is the greatest of villanies, and ought to incur some punishment, yet nothing is more common, and our topping tradesmen, who seem otherwise to stand mightily on their credit, make this but a matter of course and custom. If I do not, says one, another will (for the servant is sure to pick a hole in the person's coat who shall not pay contribution). Thus this wicked practice is carried on and winked at, while receiving of stolen goods, and confederating with felons, which is not a jot worse, is so openly cried out against, and severely punished, witness Jonathan Wild.

And yet if a master or mistress inquire after anything missing, they must be sure to place their words in due form, or madam huffs and flings about at a strange rate, What, would you make a thief of her? Who would live with such mistrustful folks? Thus you are obliged to hold your tongue, and sit down quietly by your loss, for fear of offending your maid, forsooth!

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