

DEFOE DANIEL

AN ESSAY
UPON
PROJECTS

Даниэль Дефо

An Essay Upon Projects

«Public Domain»

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Daniel Defoe

An Essay Upon Projects

INTRODUCTION

Defoe's "Essay on Projects" was the first volume he published, and no great writer ever published a first book more characteristic in expression of his tone of thought. It is practical in the highest degree, while running over with fresh speculation that seeks everywhere the well-being of society by growth of material and moral power. There is a wonderful fertility of mind, and almost whimsical precision of detail, with good sense and good humour to form the groundwork of a happy English style. Defoe in this book ran again and again into sound suggestions that first came to be realised long after he was dead. Upon one subject, indeed, the education of women, we have only just now caught him up. Defoe wrote the book in 1692 or 1693, when his age was a year or two over thirty, and he published it in 1697.

Defoe was the son of James Foe, of St. Giles's, Cripplegate, whose family had owned grazing land in the country, and who himself thrived as a meat salesman in London. James Foe went to Cripplegate Church, where the minister was Dr. Annesley. But in 1662, a year after the birth of Daniel Foe, Dr. Annesley was one of the three thousand clergymen who were driven out of their benefices by the Act of Uniformity. James Foe was then one of the congregation that followed him into exile, and looked up to him as spiritual guide when he was able to open a meeting-house in Little St. Helen's. Thus Daniel Foe, not yet De Foe, was trained under the influence of Dr. Annesley, and by his advice sent to the Academy at Newington Green, where Charles Morton, a good Oxford scholar, trained young men for the pulpits of the Nonconformists. In later days, when driven to America by the persecution of opinion, Morton became Vice-President of Harvard College. Charles Morton sought to include in his teaching at Newington Green a training in such knowledge of current history as would show his boys the origin and meaning of the controversies of the day in which, as men, they might hereafter take their part. He took pains, also, to train them in the use of English. "We were not," Defoe said afterwards, "destitute of language, but we were made masters of English; and more of us excelled in that particular than of any school at that time."

Daniel Foe did not pass on into the ministry for which he had been trained. He said afterwards, in his "Review," "It was my disaster first to be set apart for, and then to be set apart from, the honour of that sacred employ." At the age of about nineteen he went into business as a hose factor in Freeman's Court, Cornhill. He may have bought succession to a business, or sought to make one in a way of life that required no capital. He acted simply as broker between the manufacturer and the retailer. He remained at the business in Freeman's Court for seven years, subject to political distractions. In 1683, still in the reign of Charles the Second, Daniel Foe, aged twenty-two, published a pamphlet called "Presbytery Roughdrawn." Charles died on the 6th of February, 1685. On the 14th of the next June the Duke of Monmouth landed at Lyme with eighty-three followers, hoping that Englishmen enough would flock about his standard to overthrow the Government of James the Second, for whose exclusion, as a Roman Catholic, from the succession to the throne there had been so long a struggle in his brother's reign. Daniel Foe took leave of absence from his business in Freeman's Court, joined Monmouth, and shared the defeat at Sedgemoor on the 6th of July. Judge Jeffreys then made progress through the West, and Daniel Foe escaped from his clutches. On the 15th of July Monmouth was executed. Daniel Foe found it convenient at that time to pay personal attention to some business affairs in Spain. His name suggests an English reading of a Spanish name, Foà, and more than once in his life there are indications of friends in Spain about whom we know nothing. Daniel Foe went to Spain in the time of danger to his life, for taking part in the rebellion of the Duke of Monmouth, and when

he came back he wrote himself De Foe. He may have heard pedigree discussed among his Spanish friends; he may have wished to avoid drawing attention to a name entered under the letter F in a list of rebels. He may have played on the distinction between himself and his father, still living, that one was Mr. Foe, the other Mr. D. Foe. He may have meant to write much, and wishing to be a friend to his country, meant also to deprive punsters of the opportunity of calling him a Foe. Whatever his chief reason for the change, we may be sure that it was practical.

In April, 1687, James the Second issued a Declaration for Liberty of Conscience in England, by which he suspended penal laws against all Roman Catholics and Nonconformists, and dispensed with oaths and tests established by the law. This was a stretch of the king's prerogative that produced results immediately welcome to the Nonconformists, who sent up addresses of thanks. Defoe saw clearly that a king who is thanked for overruling an unwelcome law has the whole point conceded to him of right to overrule the law. In that sense he wrote, "A Letter containing some Reflections on His Majesty's Declaration for Liberty of Conscience," to warn the Nonconformists of the great mistake into which some were falling. "Was ever anything," he asked afterwards, "more absurd than this conduct of King James and his party, in wheedling the Dissenters; giving them liberty of conscience by his own arbitrary dispensing authority, and his expecting they should be content with their religious liberty at the price of the Constitution?" In the letter itself he pointed out that "the king's suspending of laws strikes at the root of this whole Government, and subverts it quite. The Lords and Commons have such a share in it, that no law can be either made, repealed, or, which is all one, suspended, but by their consent."

In January, 1688, Defoe having inherited the freedom of the City of London, took it up, and signed his name in the Chamberlain's book, on the 26th of that month, without the "de," "Daniel Foe." On the 5th of November, 1688, there was another landing, that of William of Orange, in Torbay, which threatened the government of James the Second. Defoe again rode out, met the army of William at Henley-on-Thames, and joined its second line as a volunteer. He was present when it was resolved, on the 13th of February, 1689, that the flight of James had been an abdication; and he was one of the mounted citizens who formed a guard of honour when William and Mary paid their first visit to Guildhall.

Defoe was at this time twenty-eight years old, married, and living in a house at Tooting, where he had also been active in foundation of a chapel. From hose factor he had become merchant adventurer in trade with Spain, and is said by one writer of his time to have been a "civet-cat merchant." Failing then in some venture in 1692, he became bankrupt, and had one vindictive creditor who, according to the law of those days, had power to shut him in prison, and destroy all power of recovering his loss and putting himself straight with the world. Until his other creditors had conquered that one enemy, and could give him freedom to earn money again and pay his debts – when that time came he proved his sense of honesty to much larger than the letter of the law – Defoe left London for Bristol, and there kept out of the way of arrest. He was visible only on Sunday, and known, therefore, as "the Sunday Gentleman." His lodging was at the Red Lion Inn, in Castle Street. The house, no longer an inn, still stands, as numbers 80 and 81 in that street. There Defoe wrote this "Essay on Projects." He was there until 1694, when he received offers that would have settled him prosperously in business at Cadiz, but he held by his country. The cheek on free action was removed, and the Government received with favour a project of his, which is not included in the Essay, "for raising money to supply the occasions of the war then newly begun." He had also a project for the raising of money to supply his own occasions by the establishment of pantile works, which proved successful. Defoe could not be idle. In a desert island he would, like his Robinson Crusoe, have spent time, not in lamentation, but in steady work to get away.

H. M.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

To DALBY THOMAS, Esq.,

One of the Commission's for Managing His majesty's Duties on Glass, &c.

Sir,

This preface comes directed to you, not as commissioner, &c., under whom I have the honour to serve his Majesty, nor as a friend, though I have great obligations of that sort also, but as the most proper judge of the subjects treated of, and more capable than the greatest part of mankind to distinguish and understand them.

Books are useful only to such whose genius are suitable to the subject of them; and to dedicate a book of projects to a person who had never concerned himself to think that way would be like music to one that has no ear.

And yet your having a capacity to judge of these things no way brings you under the despicable title of a projector, any more than knowing the practices and subtleties of wicked men makes a man guilty of their crimes.

The several chapters of this book are the results of particular thoughts occasioned by conversing with the public affairs during the present war with France. The losses and casualties which attend all trading nations in the world, when involved in so cruel a war as this, have reached us all, and I am none of the least sufferers; if this has put me, as well as others, on inventions and projects, so much the subject of this book, it is no more than a proof of the reason I give for the general projecting humour of the nation.

One unhappiness I lie under in the following book, viz.: That having kept the greatest part of it by me for near five years, several of the thoughts seem to be hit by other hands, and some by the public, which turns the tables upon me, as if I had borrowed from them.

As particularly that of the seamen, which you know well I had contrived long before the Act for registering seamen was proposed. And that of educating women, which I think myself bound to declare, was formed long before the book called "Advice to the Ladies" was made public; and yet I do not write this to magnify my own invention, but to acquit myself from grafting on other people's thoughts. If I have trespassed upon any person in the world, it is upon yourself, from whom I had some of the notions about county banks, and factories for goods, in the chapter of banks; and yet I do not think that my proposal for the women or the seamen clashes at all, either with that book, or the public method of registering seamen.

I have been told since this was done that my proposal for a commission of inquiries into bankrupt estates is borrowed from the Dutch; if there is anything like it among the Dutch, it is more than ever I knew, or know yet; but if so, I hope it is no objection against our having the same here, especially if it be true that it would be so publicly beneficial as is expressed.

What is said of friendly societies, I think no man will dispute with me, since one has met with so much success already in the practice of it. I mean the Friendly Society for Widows, of which you have been pleased to be a governor.

Friendly societies are very extensive, and, as I have hinted, might be carried on to many particulars. I have omitted one which was mentioned in discourse with yourself, where a hundred tradesmen, all of several trades, agree together to buy whatever they want of one another, and nowhere else, prices and payments to be settled among themselves; whereby every man is sure to have ninety-nine customers, and can never want a trade; and I could have filled up the book with instances of like nature, but I never designed to fire the reader with particulars.

The proposal of the pension office you will soon see offered to the public as an attempt for the relief of the poor; which, if it meets with encouragement, will every way answer all the great things I have said of it.

I had wrote a great many sheets about the coin, about bringing in plate to the Mint, and about our standard; but so many great heads being upon it, with some of whom my opinion does not agree, I would not adventure to appear in print upon that subject.

Ways and means also I have laid by on the same score: only adhering to this one point, that be it by taxing the wares they sell, be it by taxing them in stock, be it by composition – which, by the way, I believe is the best – be it by what way soever the Parliament please, the retailers are the men who seem to call upon us to be taxed; if not by their own extraordinary good circumstances, though that might bear it, yet by the contrary in all other degrees of the kingdom.

Besides, the retailers are the only men who could pay it with least damage, because it is in their power to levy it again upon their customers in the prices of their goods, and is no more than paying a higher rent for their shops.

The retailers of manufactures, especially so far as relates to the inland trade, have never been taxed yet, and their wealth or number is not easily calculated. Trade and land has been handled roughly enough, and these are the men who now lie as a reserve to carry on the burden of the war.

These are the men who, were the land tax collected as it should be, ought to pay the king more than that whole Bill ever produced; and yet these are the men who, I think I may venture to say, do not pay a twentieth part in that Bill.

Should the king appoint a survey over the assessors, and indict all those who were found faulty, allowing a reward to any discoverer of an assessment made lower than the literal sense of the Act implies, what a register of frauds and connivances would be found out!

In a general tax, if any should be excused, it should be the poor, who are not able to pay, or at least are pinched in the necessary parts of life by paying. And yet here a poor labourer, who works for twelve pence or eighteen pence a day, does not drink a pot of beer but pays the king a tenth part for excise; and really pays more to the king's taxes in a year than a country shopkeeper, who is alderman of the town, worth perhaps two or three thousand pounds, brews his own beer, pays no excise, and in the land-tax is rated it may be at £100, and pays £1 4s. per annum, but ought, if the Act were put in due execution, to pay £36 per annum to the king.

If I were to be asked how I would remedy this, I would answer, it should be by some method in which every man may be taxed in the due proportion to his estate, and the Act put in execution, according to the true intent and meaning of it, in order to which a commission of assessment should be granted to twelve men, such as his Majesty should be well satisfied of, who should go through the whole kingdom, three in a body, and should make a new assessment of personal estates, not to meddle with land.

To these assessors should all the old rates, parish books, poor rates, and highway rates, also be delivered; and upon due inquiry to be made into the manner of living, and reputed wealth of the people, the stock or personal estate of every man should be assessed, without connivance; and he who is reputed to be worth a thousand pounds should be taxed at a thousand pounds, and so on; and he who was an overgrown rich tradesman of twenty or thirty thousand pounds estate should be taxed so, and plain English and plain dealing be practised indifferently throughout the kingdom; tradesmen and landed men should have neighbours' fare, as we call it, and a rich man should not be passed by when a poor man pays.

We read of the inhabitants of Constantinople, that they suffered their city to be lost for want of contributing in time for its defence, and pleaded poverty to their generous emperor when he went from house to house to persuade them; and yet when the Turks took it, the prodigious immense wealth they found in it, made them wonder at the sordid temper of the citizens.

England (with due exceptions to the Parliament, and the freedom wherewith they have given to the public charge) is much like Constantinople; we are involved in a dangerous, a chargeable, but withal a most just and necessary war, and the richest and moneyed men in the kingdom plead poverty; and the French, or King James, or the devil may come for them, if they can but conceal their estates from the public notice, and get the assessors to tax them at an under rate.

These are the men this commission would discover; and here they should find men taxed at £500 stock who are worth £20,000. Here they should find a certain rich man near Hackney rated to-day in the tax-book at £1,000 stock, and to-morrow offering £27,000 for an estate.

Here they should find Sir J – C – perhaps taxed to the king at £5,000 stock, perhaps not so much, whose cash no man can guess at; and multitudes of instances I could give by name without wrong to the gentlemen.

And, not to run on in particulars, I affirm that in the land-tax ten certain gentlemen in London put together did not pay for half so much personal estate, called stock, as the poorest of them is reputed really to possess.

I do not inquire at whose door this fraud must lie; it is none of my business.

I wish they would search into it whose power can punish it. But this, with submission, I presume to say: The king is thereby defrauded and horribly abused, the true intent and meaning of Acts of Parliament evaded, the nation involved in debt by fatal deficiencies and interests, fellow-subjects abused, and new inventions for taxes occasioned.

The last chapter in this book is a proposal about entering all the seamen in England into the king's pay – a subject which deserves to be enlarged into a book itself; and I have a little volume of calculations and particulars by me on that head, but I thought them too long to publish. In short, I am persuaded, was that method proposed to those gentlemen to whom such things belong, the greatest sum of money might be raised by it, with the least injury to those who pay it, that ever was or will be during the war.

Projectors, they say, are generally to be taken with allowance of one-half at least; they always have their mouths full of millions, and talk big of their own proposals. And therefore I have not exposed the vast sums my calculations amount to; but I venture to say I could procure a farm on such a proposal as this at three millions per annum, and give very good security for payment – such an opinion I have of the value of such a method; and when that is done, the nation would get three more by paying it, which is very strange, but might easily be made out.

In the chapter of academies I have ventured to reprove the vicious custom of swearing. I shall make no apology for the fact, for no man ought to be ashamed of exposing what all men ought to be ashamed of practising. But methinks I stand corrected by my own laws a little, in forcing the reader to repeat some of the worst of our vulgar imprecations, in reading my thoughts against it; to which, however, I have this to reply:

First, I did not find it easy to express what I mean without putting down the very words – at least, not so as to be very intelligible.

Secondly, why should words repeated only to expose the vice, taint the reader more than a sermon preached against lewdness should the assembly? – for of necessity it leads the hearer to the thoughts of the fact. But the morality of every action lies in the end; and if the reader by ill-use renders himself guilty of the fact in reading, which I designed to expose by writing, the fault is his, not mine.

I have endeavoured everywhere in this book to be as concise as possible, except where calculations obliged me to be particular; and having avoided impertinence in the book, I would avoid it too, in the preface, and therefore shall break off with subscribing myself,

Sir,

Your most obliged, humble servant
D. F.

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

Necessity, which is allowed to be the mother of invention, has so violently agitated the wits of men at this time that it seems not at all improper, by way of distinction, to call it the Projecting Age. For though in times of war and public confusions the like humour of invention has seemed to stir, yet, without being partial to the present, it is, I think, no injury to say the past ages have never come up to the degree of projecting and inventing, as it refers to matters of negotiation and methods of civil polity, which we see this age arrived to.

Nor is it a hard matter to assign probable causes of the perfection in this modern art. I am not of their melancholy opinion who ascribe it to the general poverty of the nation, since I believe it is easy to prove the nation itself, taking it as one general stock, is not at all diminished or impoverished by this long, this chargeable war, but, on the contrary, was never richer since it was inhabited.

Nor am I absolutely of the opinion that we are so happy as to be wiser in this age than our forefathers; though at the same time I must own some parts of knowledge in science as well as art have received improvements in this age altogether concealed from the former.

The art of war, which I take to be the highest perfection of human knowledge, is a sufficient proof of what I say, especially in conducting armies and in offensive engines. Witness the now ways of rallies, fougades, entrenchments, attacks, lodgments, and a long *et cetera* of new inventions which want names, practised in sieges and encampments; witness the new forts of bombs and unheard-of mortars, of seven to ten ton weight, with which our fleets, standing two or three miles off at sea, can imitate God Almighty Himself and rain fire and brimstone out of heaven, as it were, upon towns built on the firm land; witness also our new-invented child of hell, the machine which carries thunder, lightning, and earthquakes in its bowels, and tears up the most impregnable fortification.

But if I would search for a cause from whence it comes to pass that this age swarms with such a multitude of projectors more than usual, who – besides the innumerable conceptions, which die in the bringing forth, and (like abortions of the brain) only come into the air and dissolve – do really every day produce new contrivances, engines, and projects to get money, never before thought of; if, I say, I would examine whence this comes to pass, it must be thus:

The losses and depredations which this war brought with it at first were exceeding many, suffered chiefly by the ill-conduct of merchants themselves, who did not apprehend the danger to be really what it was: for before our Admiralty could possibly settle convoys, cruisers, and stations for men-of-war all over the world, the French covered the sea with their privateers and took an incredible number of our ships. I have heard the loss computed, by those who pretended they were able to guess, at above fifteen millions of pounds sterling, in ships and goods, in the first two or three years of the war – a sum which, if put into French, would make such a rumbling sound of great numbers as would fright a weak accountant out of his belief, being no less than one hundred and ninety millions of *livres*. The weight of this loss fell chiefly on the trading part of the nation, and, amongst them, on the merchants; and amongst them, again, upon the most refined capacities, as the insurers, &c. And an incredible number of the best merchants in the kingdom sunk under the load, as may appear a little by a Bill which once passed the House of Commons for the relief of merchant-insurers, who had suffered by the war with France. If a great many fell, much greater were the number of those who felt a sensible ebb of their fortunes, and with difficulty bore up under the loss of great part of their estates. These, prompted by necessity, rack their wits for new contrivances, new inventions, new trades, stocks, projects, and anything to retrieve the desperate credit of their fortunes. That this is probable to be the cause will appear further thus. France (though I do not believe all the great outcries we make of their misery and distress – if one-half of which be true, they are certainly the best subjects in the world) yet without question has felt its share of the losses and damages of the war; but the poverty there falling chiefly on the poorer sort of people, they have not been so fruitful

in inventions and practices of this nature, their genius being quite of another strain. As for the gentry and more capable sort, the first thing a Frenchman flies to in his distress is the army; and he seldom comes back from thence to get an estate by painful industry, but either has his brains knocked out or makes his fortune there.

If industry be in any business rewarded with success it is in the merchandising part of the world, who indeed may more truly be said to live by their wits than any people whatsoever. All foreign negotiation, though to some it is a plain road by the help of custom, yet is in its beginning all project, contrivance, and invention. Every new voyage the merchant contrives is a project; and ships are sent from port to port, as markets and merchandises differ, by the help of strange and universal intelligence – wherein some are so exquisite, so swift, and so exact, that a merchant sitting at home in his counting-house at once converses with all parts of the known world. This and travel make a true-bred merchant the most intelligent man in the world, and consequently the most capable, when urged by necessity, to contrive new ways to live. And from hence, I humbly conceive, may very properly be derived the projects, so much the subject of the present discourse. And to this sort of men it is easy to trace the original of banks, stocks, stock-jobbing, assurances, friendly societies, lotteries, and the like.

To this may be added the long annual inquiry in the House of Commons for ways and means, which has been a particular movement to set all the heads of the nation at work; and I appeal, with submission, to the gentlemen of that honourable House, if the greatest part of all the ways and means out of the common road of land taxes, polls, and the like, have not been handed to them from the merchant, and in a great measure paid by them too.

However, I offer this but as an essay at the original of this prevailing humour of the people; and as it is probable, so it is also possible to be otherwise, which I submit to future demonstration.

Of the several ways this faculty of projecting have exerted itself, and of the various methods, as the genius of the authors has inclined, I have been a diligent observer and, in most, an unconcerned spectator, and perhaps have some advantage from thence more easily to discover the *faux pas* of the actors. If I have given an essay towards anything new, or made discovery to advantage of any contrivance now on foot, all men are at the liberty to make use of the improvement; if any fraud is discovered, as now practised, it is without any particular reflection upon parties or persons.

Projects of the nature I treat about are doubtless in general of public advantage, as they tend to improvement of trade, and employment of the poor, and the circulation and increase of the public stock of the kingdom; but this is supposed of such as are built on the honest basis of ingenuity and improvement, in which, though I will allow the author to aim primarily at his own advantage, yet with the circumstances of public benefit added.

Wherefore it is necessary to distinguish among the projects of the present times between the honest and the dishonest.

There are, and that too many, fair pretences of fine discoveries, new inventions, engines, and I know not what, which – being advanced in notion, and talked up to great things to be performed when such and such sums of money shall be advanced, and such and such engines are made – have raised the fancies of credulous people to such a height that, merely on the shadow of expectation, they have formed companies, chose committees, appointed officers, shares, and books, raised great stocks, and cried up an empty notion to that degree that people have been betrayed to part with their money for shares in a new nothing; and when the inventors have carried on the jest till they have sold all their own interest, they leave the cloud to vanish of itself, and the poor purchasers to quarrel with one another, and go to law about settlements, transferrings, and some bone or other thrown among them by the subtlety of the author to lay the blame of the miscarriage upon themselves. Thus the shares at first begin to fall by degrees, and happy is he that sells in time; till, like brass money, it will go at last for nothing at all. So have I seen shares in joint-stocks, patents, engines, and undertakings, blown up by the air of great words, and the name of some man of credit concerned, to £100 for a five-hundredth part or share (some more), and at last dwindle away till it has been stock-jobbed down

to £10, £12, £9, £8 a share, and at last no buyer (that is, in short, the fine new word for nothing-worth), and many families ruined by the purchase. If I should name linen manufactures, saltpetre-works, copper mines, diving engines, dipping, and the like, for instances of this, I should, I believe, do no wrong to truth, or to some persons too visibly guilty.

I might go on upon this subject to expose the frauds and tricks of stock-jobbers, engineers, patentees, committees, with those Exchange mountebanks we very properly call brokers, but I have not gaul enough for such a work; but as a general rule of caution to those who would not be tricked out of their estates by such pretenders to new inventions, let them observe that all such people who may be suspected of design have assuredly this in their proposal: your money to the author must go before the experiment. And here I could give a very diverting history of a patent-monger whose cully was nobody but myself, but I refer it to another occasion.

But this is no reason why invention upon honest foundations and to fair purposes should not be encouraged; no, nor why the author of any such fair contrivances should not reap the harvest of his own ingenuity. Our Acts of Parliament for granting patents to first inventors for fourteen years is a sufficient acknowledgment of the due regard which ought to be had to such as find out anything which may be of public advantage; new discoveries in trade, in arts and mysteries, of manufacturing goods, or improvement of land, are without question of as great benefit as any discoveries made in the works of nature by all the academies and royal societies in the world.

There is, it is true, a great difference between new inventions and projects, between improvement of manufactures or lands (which tend to the immediate benefit of the public, and employing of the poor), and projects framed by subtle heads with a sort of a *deceptio visus* and legerdemain, to bring people to run needless and unusual hazards: I grant it, and give a due preference to the first. And yet success has so sanctified some of those other sorts of projects that it would be a kind of blasphemy against fortune to disallow them. Witness Sir William Phips's voyage to the wreck; it was a mere project; a lottery of a hundred thousand to one odds; a hazard which, if it had failed, everybody would have been ashamed to have owned themselves concerned in; a voyage that would have been as much ridiculed as Don Quixote's adventure upon the windmill. Bless us! that folks should go three thousand miles to angle in the open sea for pieces of eight! Why, they would have made ballads of it, and the merchants would have said of every unlikely adventure, "It, was like Phips's wreck-voyage." But it had success, and who reflects upon the project?

"Nothing's so partial as the laws of fate,
Erecting blockheads to suppress the great.
Sir Francis Drake the Spanish plate-fleet won;
He had been a pirate if he had got none.
Sir Walter Raleigh strove, but missed the plate,
And therefore died a traitor to the State.
Endeavour bears a value more or less,
Just as 'tis recommended by success:
The lucky coxcomb ev'ry man will prize,
And prosp'rous actions always pass for wise."

However, this sort of projects comes under no reflection as to their honesty, save that there is a kind of honesty a man owes to himself and to his family that prohibits him throwing away his estate in impracticable, improbable adventures; but still some hit, even of the most unlikely, of which this was one of Sir William Phips, who brought home a cargo of silver of near £200,000 sterling, in pieces of eight, fished up out of the open sea, remote from any shore, from an old Spanish ship which had been sunk above forty years.

The History of Projects

When I speak of writing a History of Projects, I do not mean either of the introduction of, or continuing, necessary inventions, or the improvement of arts and sciences before known, but a short account of projects and projecting, as the word is allowed in the general acceptance at this present time; and I need not go far back for the original of the practice.

Invention of arts, with engines and handicraft instruments for their improvement, requires a chronology as far back as the eldest son of Adam, and has to this day afforded some new discovery in every age.

The building of the Ark by Noah, so far as you will allow it a human work, was the first project I read of; and, no question, seemed so ridiculous to the graver heads of that wise, though wicked, age that poor Noah was sufficiently bantered for it: and, had he not been set on work by a very peculiar direction from heaven, the good old man would certainly have been laughed out of it as a most senseless ridiculous project.

The building of Babel was a right project; for indeed the true definition of a project, according to modern acceptance, is, as is said before, a vast undertaking, too big to be managed, and therefore likely enough to come to nothing. And yet, as great as they are, it is certainly true of them all, even as the projectors propose: that, according to the old tale, if so many eggs are hatched, there will be so many chickens, and those chickens may lay so many eggs more, and those eggs produce so many chickens more, and so on. Thus it was most certainly true that if the people of the Old World could have built a house up to heaven, they should never be drowned again on earth, and they only had forgot to measure the height; that is, as in other projects, it only miscarried, or else it would have succeeded.

And yet, when all is done, that very building, and the incredible height it was carried, is a demonstration of the vast knowledge of that infant age of the world, who had no advantage of the experiments or invention of any before themselves.

“Thus when our fathers, touched with guilt,
That huge stupendous staircase built;
We mock, indeed, the fruitless enterprise
(For fruitless actions seldom pass for wise),
But were the mighty ruins left, they’d show
To what degree that untaught age did know.”

I believe a very diverting account might be given of this, but I shall not attempt it. Some are apt to say with Solomon, “No new thing happens under the sun; but what is, has been:” yet I make no question but some considerable discovery has been made in these latter ages, and inventions of human origin produced, which the world was ever without before, either in whole or in part; and I refer only to two cardinal points, the use of the loadstone at sea, and the use of gunpowder and guns: both which, as to the inventing part, I believe the world owes as absolutely to those particular ages as it does the working in brass and iron to Tubal Cain, or the inventing of music to Jubal, his brother. As to engines and instruments for handicraftsmen, this age, I daresay, can show such as never were so much as thought of, much less imitated before; for I do not call that a real invention which has something before done like it – I account that more properly an improvement. For handicraft instruments, I know none owes more to true genuine contrivance, without borrowing from any former use, than a mechanic engine contrived in our time called a knitting-frame, which, built with admirable symmetry, works really with a very happy success, and may be observed by the curious to have a more than ordinary composition; for which I refer to the engine itself, to be seen in every stocking-weaver’s garret.

I shall trace the original of the projecting humour that now reigns no farther back than the year 1680, dating its birth as a monster then, though by times it had indeed something of life in the time of the late civil war. I allow, no age has been altogether without something of this nature, and some very happy projects are left to us as a taste of their success; as the water-houses for supplying of the city of London with water, and, since that, the New River – both very considerable undertakings, and perfect projects, adventured on the risk of success. In the reign of King Charles I. infinite projects were set on foot for raising money without a Parliament: oppressing by monopolies and privy seals; but these are excluded our scheme as irregularities, for thus the French are as fruitful in projects as we; and these are rather stratagems than projects. After the Fire of London the contrivance of an engine to quench fires was a project the author was said to get well by, and we have found to be very useful. But about the year 1680 began the art and mystery of projecting to creep into the world. Prince Rupert, uncle to King Charles II., gave great encouragement to that part of it that respects engines and mechanical motions; and Bishop Wilkins added as much of the theory to it as writing a book could do. The prince has left us a metal called by his name; and the first project upon that was, as I remember, casting of guns of that metal and boring them – done both by a peculiar method of his own, and which died with him, to the great loss of the undertaker, who to that purpose had, with no small charge, erected a water-mill at Hackney Marsh, known by the name of the Temple Mill, which mill very happily performed all parts of the work; and I have seen some of those guns on board the Royal Charles, a first-rate ship, being of a reddish colour, different either from brass or copper. I have heard some reasons of state assigned why that project was not permitted to go forward; but I omit them, because I have no good authority for them. After this we saw a floating-machine, to be wrought with horses, for the towing of great ships both against wind and tide; and another for the raising of ballast, which, as unperforming engines, had the honour of being made, exposed, tried, and laid by before the prince died.

If thus we introduce it into the world under the conduct of that prince, when he died it was left a hopeless brat, and had hardly any hand to own it, till the wreck-voyage before noted, performed so happily by Captain Phips, afterwards Sir William, whose strange performance set a great many heads on work to contrive something for themselves. He was immediately followed by my Lord Mordant, Sir John Narborough, and others from several parts, whose success made them soon weary of the work.

The project of the Penny Post, so well known and still practised, I cannot omit, nor the contriver, Mr. Dockwra, who has had the honour to have the injury done him in that affair repaired in some measure by the public justice of the Parliament. And, the experiment proving it to be a noble and useful design, the author must be remembered, wherever mention is made of that affair, to his very great reputation.

It was, no question, a great hardship for a man to be master of so fine a thought, that had both the essential ends of a project in it (public good and private want), and that the public should reap the benefit and the author be left out; the injustice of which, no doubt, discouraged many a good design. But since an alteration in public circumstances has recovered the lost attribute of justice, the like is not to be feared. And Mr. Dockwra has had the satisfaction to see the former injury disowned, and an honourable return made, even by them who did not the injury, in bare respect to his ingenuity.

A while before this several people, under the patronage of some great persons, had engaged in planting of foreign colonies (as William Penn, the Lord Shaftesbury, Dr. Cox, and others) in Pennsylvania, Carolina, East and West Jersey, and the like places, which I do not call projects, because it was only prosecuting what had been formerly begun. But here began the forming of public joint-stocks, which, together with the East India, African, and Hudson's Bay Companies, before established, begot a new trade, which we call by a new name stock-jobbing, which was at first only the simple occasional transferring of interest and shares from one to another, as persons alienated their estates; but by the industry of the Exchange brokers, who got the business into their hands, it became a trade, and one perhaps managed with the greatest intrigue, artifice, and trick that ever

anything that appeared with a face of honesty could be handled with; for while the brokers held the box, they made the whole Exchange the gamesters, and raised and lowered the prices of stocks as they pleased, and always had both buyers and sellers who stood ready innocently to commit their money to the mercy of their mercenary tongues. This upstart of a trade, having tasted the sweetness of success which generally attends a novel proposal, introduces the illegitimate wandering object I speak of, as a proper engine to find work for the brokers. Thus stock-jobbing nursed projecting, and projecting, in return, has very diligently pimped for its foster-parent, till both are arrived to be public grievances, and indeed are now almost grown scandalous.

OF PROJECTORS

Man is the worst of all God's creatures to shift for himself; no other animal is ever starved to death; nature without has provided them both food and clothes, and nature within has placed an instinct that never fails to direct them to proper means for a supply; but man must either work or starve, slave or die. He has indeed reason given him to direct him, and few who follow the dictates of that reason come to such unhappy exigences; but when by the errors of a man's youth he has reduced himself to such a degree of distress as to be absolutely without three things – money, friends, and health – he dies in a ditch, or in some worse place, a hospital.

Ten thousand ways there are to bring a man to this, and but very few to bring him out again.

Death is the universal deliverer, and therefore some who want courage to bear what they see before them, hang themselves for fear; for certainly self-destruction is the effect of cowardice in the highest extreme.

Others break the bounds of laws to satisfy that general law of nature, and turn open thieves, house-breakers, highwaymen, clippers, coiners, &c., till they run the length of the gallows, and get a deliverance the nearest way at St. Tyburn.

Others, being masters of more cunning than their neighbours, turn their thoughts to private methods of trick and cheat, a modern way of thieving every jot as criminal, and in some degree worse than the other, by which honest men are gulled with fair pretences to part from their money, and then left to take their course with the author, who skulks behind the curtain of a protection, or in the Mint or Friars, and bids defiance as well to honesty as the law.

Others, yet urged by the same necessity, turn their thoughts to honest invention, founded upon the platform of ingenuity and integrity.

These two last sorts are those we call projectors; and as there was always more geese than swans, the number of the latter are very inconsiderable in comparison of the former; and as the greater number denominates the less, the just contempt we have of the former sort bespatters the other, who, like cuckolds, bear the reproach of other people's crimes.

A mere projector, then, is a contemptible thing, driven by his own desperate fortune to such a strait that he must be delivered by a miracle, or starve; and when he has beat his brains for some such miracle in vain, he finds no remedy but to paint up some bauble or other, as players make puppets talk big, to show like a strange thing, and then cry it up for a new invention, gets a patent for it, divides it into shares, and they must be sold. Ways and means are not wanting to swell the new whim to a vast magnitude; thousands and hundreds of thousands are the least of his discourse, and sometimes millions, till the ambition of some honest coxcomb is wheedled to part with his money for it, and then (*nascitur ridiculus mus*) the adventurer is left to carry on the project, and the projector laughs at him. The diver shall walk at the bottom of the Thames, the saltpetre maker shall build Tom T – d's pond into houses, the engineers build models and windmills to draw water, till funds are raised to carry it on by men who have more money than brains, and then good-night patent and invention; the projector has done his business and is gone.

But the honest projector is he who, having by fair and plain principles of sense, honesty, and ingenuity brought any contrivance to a suitable perfection, makes out what he pretends to, picks nobody's pocket, puts his project in execution, and contents himself with the real produce as the profit of his invention.

OF BANKS

Banks, without question, if rightly managed are, or may be, of great advantage, especially to a trading people, as the English are; and, among many others, this is one particular case in which that benefit appears: that they bring down the interest of money, and take from the goldsmiths, scriveners, and others, who have command of running cash, their most delicious trade of making advantage of the necessities of the merchant in extravagant discounts and premiums for advance of money, when either large customs or foreign remittances call for disbursements beyond his common ability; for by the easiness of terms on which the merchant may have money, he is encouraged to venture further in trade than otherwise he would do. Not but that there are other great advantages a Royal Bank might procure in this kingdom, as has been seen in part by this; as advancing money to the Exchequer upon Parliamentary funds and securities, by which in time of a war our preparations for any expedition need not be in danger of miscarriage for want of money, though the taxes raised be not speedily paid, nor the Exchequer burthened with the excessive interests paid in former reigns upon anticipations of the revenue; landed men might be supplied with moneys upon securities on easier terms, which would prevent the loss of multitudes of estates, now ruined and devoured by insolent and merciless mortgagees, and the like. But now we unhappily see a Royal Bank established by Act of Parliament, and another with a large fund upon the Orphans' stock; and yet these advantages, or others, which we expected, not answered, though the pretensions in both have not been wanting at such time as they found it needful to introduce themselves into public esteem, by giving out prints of what they were rather able to do than really intended to practise. So that our having two banks at this time settled, and more erecting, has not yet been able to reduce the interest of money, not because the nature and foundation of their constitution does not tend towards it, but because, finding their hands full of better business, they are wiser than by being slaves to old obsolete proposals to lose the advantage of the great improvement they can make of their stock.

This, however, does not at all reflect on the nature of a bank, nor of the benefit it would be to the public trading part of the kingdom, whatever it may seem to do on the practice of the present. We find four or five banks now in view to be settled. I confess I expect no more from those to come than we have found from the past, and I think I make no broach on either my charity or good manners in saying so; and I reflect not upon any of the banks that are or shall be established for not doing what I mention, but for making such publications of what they would do. I cannot think any man had expected the Royal Bank should lend money on mortgages at 4 per cent. (nor was it much the better for them to make publication they would do so from the beginning of January next after their settlement), since to this day, as I am informed, they have not lent one farthing in that manner.

Our banks are indeed nothing but so many goldsmiths' shops, where the credit being high (and the directors as high) people lodge their money; and they – the directors, I mean – make their advantage of it. If you lay it at demand, they allow you nothing; if at time, 3 per cent.; and so would any goldsmith in Lombard Street have done before. But the very banks themselves are so awkward in lending, so strict, so tedious, so inquisitive, and withal so public in their taking securities, that men who are anything tender won't go to them; and so the easiness of borrowing money, so much designed, is defeated. For here is a private interest to be made, though it be a public one; and, in short, it is only a great trade carried on for the private gain of a few concerned in the original stock; and though we are to hope for great things, because they have promised them, yet they are all future that we know of.

And yet all this while a bank might be very beneficial to this kingdom; and this might be so, if either their own ingenuity or public authority would oblige them to take the public good into equal concern with their private interest.

To explain what I mean; banks, being established by public authority, ought also, as all public things are, to be under limitations and restrictions from that authority; and those limitations being

regulated with a proper regard to the ease of trade in general, and the improvement of the stock in particular, would make a bank a useful, profitable thing indeed.

First, a bank ought to be of a magnitude proportioned to the trade of the country it is in, which this bank is so far from that it is no more to the whole than the least goldsmith's cash in Lombard Street is to the bank, from whence it comes to pass that already more banks are contriving. And I question not but banks in London will ere long be as frequent as lotteries; the consequence of which, in all probability, will be the diminishing their reputation, or a civil war with one another. It is true, the Bank of England has a capital stock; but yet, was that stock wholly clear of the public concern of the Government, it is not above a fifth part of what would be necessary to manage the whole business of the town – which it ought, though not to do, at least to be able to do. And I suppose I may venture to say above one-half of the stock of the present bank is taken up in the affairs of the Exchequer.

I suppose nobody will take this discourse for an invective against the Bank of England. I believe it is a very good fund, a very useful one, and a very profitable one. It has been useful to the Government, and it is profitable to the proprietors; and the establishing it at such a juncture, when our enemies were making great boasts of our poverty and want of money, was a particular glory to our nation, and the city in particular. That when the Paris Gazette informed the world that the Parliament had indeed given the king grants for raising money in funds to be paid in remote years, but money was so scarce that no anticipations could be procured; that just then, besides three millions paid into the Exchequer that spring on other taxes by way of advance, there was an overplus-stock to be found of £1,200,000 sterling, or (to make it speak French) of above fifteen millions, which was all paid voluntarily into the Exchequer. Besides this, I believe the present Bank of England has been very useful to the Exchequer, and to supply the king with remittances for the payment of the army in Flanders, which has also, by the way, been very profitable to itself. But still this bank is not of that bulk that the business done here requires, nor is it able, with all the stock it has, to procure the great proposed benefit, the lowering the interest of money: whereas all foreign banks absolutely govern the interest, both at Amsterdam, Genoa, and other places. And this defect I conceive the multiplicity of banks cannot supply, unless a perfect understanding could be secured between them.

To remedy this defect, several methods might be proposed. Some I shall take the freedom to hint at: —

First, that the present bank increase their stock to at least five millions sterling, to be settled as they are already, with some small limitations to make the methods more beneficial.

Five millions sterling is an immense sum; to which add the credit of their cash, which would supply them with all the overplus-money in the town, and probably might amount to half as much more; and then the credit of running bills, which by circulating would, no question, be an equivalent to the other half: so that in stock, credit, and bank-bills the balance of their cash would be always ten millions sterling – a sum that everybody who can talk of does not understand.

But then to find business for all this stock, which, though it be a strange thing to think of, is nevertheless easy when it comes to be examined. And first for the business; this bank should enlarge the number of their directors, as they do of their stock, and should then establish several sub-committees, composed of their own members, who should have the directing of several offices relating to the distinct sorts of business they referred to, to be overruled and governed by the governor and directors in a body, but to have a conclusive power as to contracts. Of these there should be —

One office for loan of money for customs of goods, which by a plain method might be so ordered that the merchant might with ease pay the highest customs down, and so, by allowing the bank 4 per cent. advance, be first sure to secure the £10 per cent. which the king allows for prompt payment at the Custom House, and be also freed from the troublesome work of finding bondsmen and securities for the money – which has exposed many a man to the tyranny of extents, either for himself or his friend, to his utter ruin, who under a more moderate prosecution had been able to pay all his debts, and by this method has been torn to pieces and disabled from making any tolerable

proposal to his creditors. This is a scene of large business, and would, in proportion, employ a large cash, and it is the easiest thing in the world to make the bank the paymaster of all the large customs, and yet the merchant have so honourable a possession of his goods, as may be neither any diminution to his reputation or any hindrance to their sale.

As, for example, suppose I have 100 hogsheads of tobacco to import, whose customs by several duties come to £1,000, and want cash to clear them. I go with my bill of loading to the bank, who appoint their officer to enter the goods and pay the duties, which goods, so entered by the bank, shall give them title enough to any part, or the whole, without the trouble of bills of sale, or conveyances, defeasances, and the like. The goods are carried to a warehouse at the waterside, where the merchant has a free and public access to them, as if in his own warehouse and an honourable liberty to sell and deliver either the whole (paying their disburse) or a part without it, leaving but sufficient for the payment, and out of that part delivered, either by notes under the hand of the purchaser, or any other way, he may clear the same, without any exactions, but of £4 per cent., and the rest are his own.

The ease this would bring to trade, the deliverance it would bring to the merchants from the insults of goldsmiths, &c., and the honour it would give to our management of public imposts, with the advantages to the Custom House itself, and the utter destruction of extortion, would be such as would give a due value to the bank, and make all mankind acknowledge it to be a public good. The grievance of exactions upon merchants in this case is very great, and when I lay the blame on the goldsmiths, because they are the principal people made use of in such occasions, I include a great many other sorts of brokers and money-jobbing artists, who all get a snip out of the merchant. I myself have known a goldsmith in Lombard Street lend a man £700 to pay the customs of a hundred pipes of Spanish wines; the wines were made over to him for security by bill of sale, and put into a cellar, of which the goldsmith kept the key; the merchant was to pay £6 per cent. interest on the bond, and to allow £10 percent. premium for advancing the money. When he had the wines in possession the owner could not send his cooper to look after them, but the goldsmith's man must attend all the while, for which he would be paid 5s. a day. If he brought a customer to see them, the goldsmith's man must show them. The money was lent for two months. He could not be admitted to sell or deliver a pipe of wine out single, or two or three at a time, as he might have sold them; but on a word or two spoken amiss to the goldsmith (or which he was pleased to take so), he would have none sold but the whole parcel together. By this usage the goods lay on hand, and every month the money remained the goldsmith demanded a guinea per cent. forbearance, besides the interest, till at last by leakage, decay, and other accidents, the wines began to lessen. Then the goldsmith begins to tell the merchant he is afraid the wines are not worth the money he has lent, and demands further security, and in a little while, growing higher and rougher, he tells him he must have his money. The merchant – too much at his mercy, because he cannot provide the money – is forced to consent to the sale; and the goods, being reduced to seventy pipes sound – wine and four unsound (the rest being sunk for filling up), were sold for £13 per pipe the sound, and £3 the unsound, which amounted to £922 together.

	£	s.	d.
The cooper's bill came to	30	0	0
The cellarge a year and a half to	18	0	0
Interests on the bond to	63	0	0
The goldsmith's men for attendance	8	0	0
Allowance for advance of the money and forbearance	74	0	0
	193	0	0
Principal money borrowed	700	0	0
	893	0	0
Due to the merchant	29	0	0
	922	0	0

By the moderateest computation that can be, these wines cost the merchant as follows: —

<i>First Cost with Charges on Board.</i>	£	s.	d.
In Lisbon 15 mille reis per pipe is 1,500 mille reis; exchange, at 6s. 4d. per mille rei	475	0	0
Freight to London, then at £3 per ton	150	0	0
Assurance on £500 at 2 per cent.	10	0	0
Petty charges	5	0	0
	640	0	0

So that it is manifest by the extortion of this banker, the poor man lost the whole capital with freight and charges, and made but £29 produce of a hundred pipes of wine.

One other office of this bank, and which would take up a considerable branch of the stock, is for lending money upon pledges, which should have annexed to it a warehouse and factory, where all sorts of goods might publicly be sold by the consent of the owners, to the great advantage of the owner, the bank receiving £4 per cent. interest., and 2 per cent. commission for sale of the goods.

A third office should be appointed for discounting bills, tallies, and notes, by which all tallies of the Exchequer, and any part of the revenue, should at stated allowances be ready money to any person, to the great advantage of the Government, and ease of all such as are any ways concerned in public undertakings.

A fourth office for lending money upon land securities at 4 per cent. interest, by which the cruelty and injustice of mortgagees would be wholly restrained, and a register of mortgages might be very well kept, to prevent frauds.

A fifth office for exchanges and foreign correspondences.

A sixth for inland exchanges, where a very large field of business lies before them.

Under this head it will not be improper to consider that this method will most effectually answer all the notions and proposals of county banks; for by this office they would be all rendered useless and unprofitable, since one bank of the magnitude I mention, with a branch of its office set apart for that business, might with ease manage all the inland exchange of the kingdom.

By which such a correspondence with all the trading towns in England might be maintained, as that the whole kingdom should trade with the bank. Under the direction of this office a public cashier should be appointed in every county, to reside in the capital town as to trade (and in some counties more), through whose hands all the cash of the revenue of the gentry and of trade should be returned on the bank in London, and from the bank again on their cashier in every respective county or town, at the small exchange of 0.5 per cent., by which means all loss of money carried upon the road, to the encouragement of robbers and ruining of the country, who are sued for those robberies, would be more effectually prevented than by all the statutes against highwaymen that are or can be made.

As to public advancements of money to the Government, they may be left to the directors in a body, as all other disputes and contingent cases are; and whoever examines these heads of business apart, and has any judgment in the particulars, will, I suppose, allow that a stock of ten millions may find employment in them, though it be indeed a very great sum.

I could offer some very good reasons why this way of management by particular offices for every particular sort of business is not only the easiest, but the safest, way of executing an affair of such variety and consequence; also I could state a method for the proceedings of those private offices, their conjunction with and dependence on the general court of the directors, and how the various accounts should centre in one general capital account of stock, with regulations and appeals; but I believe them to be needless – at least, in this place.

If it be objected here that it is impossible for one joint-stock to go through the whole business of the kingdom, I answer, I believe it is not either impossible or impracticable, particularly on this one account: that almost all the country business would be managed by running bills, and those the

longest abroad of any, their distance keeping them out, to the increasing the credit, and consequently the stock of the bank.

Of the Multiplicity of Banks

What is touched at in the foregoing part of this chapter refers to one bank royal to preside, as it were, over the whole cash of the kingdom: but because some people do suppose this work fitter for many banks than for one, I must a little consider that head. And first, allowing those many banks could, without clashing, maintain a constant correspondence with one another, in passing each other's bills as current from one to another, I know not but it might be better performed by many than by one; for as harmony makes music in sound, so it produces success in business.

A civil war among merchants is always the ruin of trade: I cannot think a multitude of banks could so consist with one another in England as to join interests and uphold one another's credit, without joining stocks too; I confess, if it could be done, the convenience to trade would be visible.

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