

***SECOND
THOUGHTS ARE
BEST***

***OR A FURTHER IMPROVEMENT OF
A LATE SCHEME TO PREVENT
STREET ROBBERIES***

By Daniel Defoe

SECOND THOUGHTS, &c.

THE principal encouragement and opportunity given to our street robbers is, that our streets are so poorly watched; the watchmen, for the most part, being decrepit, superannuated wretches, with one foot in the grave and the other ready to follow; so feeble that a puff of breath can blow them down. Poor crazy mortals! much fitter for an almshouse than a watchhouse. A city watched and guarded by such animals is wretchedly watched indeed.

Nay, so little terror do they carry with them, that hardy thieves make a mere jest of them, and oftentimes oblige even the very watchman who should apprehend, to light them in their roguery. And what can a poor creature do, in terror of his life, surrounded by a pack of ruffians, and no assistance near?

Add to this, that our rogues are grown more wicked than ever, and vice in all kinds is so much winked at, that robbery is accounted a petty crime. We take pains to puff them up in their villany, and thieves are set out in so amiable a light in the Beggar's Opera, it has taught them to value themselves on their profession rather than to be ashamed of it.

There was some cessation of street robberies, from the time of Bunworth and Blewitt's execution, until the introduction of this pious opera. Now we find the Cartouchian villanies revived, and London, that used to be the most safe and peaceful city in the universe, is now become a scene of rapine and danger. If some of Cartouch's gang be not come over hither to instruct our thieves, we have, doubtless, a Cartouch of our own, and a gang which, if not suppressed, may be full as pernicious as was ever Cartouch's, and London may be as dangerous as Paris, if due care be not taken.

Not content with the mischief done by the Beggar's Opera, we must have a Quaker's Opera, forsooth, of much more evil tendency than the former; for in this Jack Shepherd is made the hero of the drama, and runs through such a scene of riot and success, that but too many weak minds have been drawn away, and many unwary persons so charmed with his appearance on the stage, dressed in that elegant manner, and his pockets so well lined, they have forthwith commenced street-robbers or housebreakers; so that every idle fellow, weary of honest labour, need but fancy himself a Macheath or a Shepherd, and there is

a rogue made at once. Since, therefore, example, has such force, the stage ought to be reformed, and nothing exhibited but what might be represented before a bishop. They may be merry and wise: let them take the Provoked Husband for a pattern.

A good physician seeks the cause, and weighs the symptoms before he proceeds to prescribe; and if we trace this evil from its radix, we shall find a cause antecedent to the two operas aforesaid: namely, accursed Geneva, the bane and ruin of our lower class of people.

Those who deny an inferior class of people to be necessary in a body politic, contradict reason and experience itself; since they are most useful when industrious, and equally pernicious when lazy. By their industry our manufactures, trade, and commerce, are carried on. The merchant in his counting-house, and the captain in his cabin, would find but little employment, were it not that many hands carried on the different branches of the concerns they superintended.

But now so far are our common people infatuated with Geneva, that half the work is not done now as formerly. It debilitates and enervates them, nor are they near so strong and healthy as formerly.

So that if this abuse of Geneva be not stopped, we may go whoop for husbandmen, labourers, &c.; trade must consequently stand still, and the credit of the nation sink. Nor is the abatement of the excise, though very considerable, and most worthy notice, any ways comparable to the corruption of manners, destruction of health, and all the train of evils we are threatened with from pernicious Geneva.

We will suppose a man able to maintain himself and family by his trade, and at the same time to be a Geneva drinker. This fellow first makes himself incapable of working by being continually drunk; which runs him behindhand, so that he either pawns, or neglects his work, for which reason nobody will employ him. At last, fear of arrests, his own hunger, the cries of a family for bread, his natural desire to support an irregular life, and a propense hatred to labour, turn but too many an honest tradesman into an arrant desperate rogue. And these are commonly the means that furnish us with thieves and villains in general.

Thus is a man, who might be useful in a body politic, rendered obnoxious to the same: so that if this trade of wickedness goes on, they

will increase upon us so much that we shall not dare to stir out of our habitations; nay, it will be well if they arrive not to the impudence of plundering our houses at noonday.

Where is the courage of the English nation, that a gentleman, with six or seven servants, shall be robbed by one single highwayman? Yet we have lately had instances of this; and for this we may thank our effeminacy, our toupee wigs, and powdered pates, our tea, and other scandalous fopperies; and, above all, the disuse of noble and manly sports, so necessary to a brave people, once in vogue, but now totally lost amongst us.

Let not the reader think I run from my subject if I search the bottom of the distemper before I propose a cure, which having done, though indeed but slightly, for this is an argument could be carried to a much greater length, I proceed to the purpose in manner following: —

Let the watch be composed of stout able-bodied men, and of those a sufficient number, that is to say, a watchman to every forty houses, twenty on one side of the way, and twenty on the other; for it is observable that a man cannot well see distinctly beyond the extent of twenty houses in a row; if it is a single row, and no opposite houses, the charge must be greater, or their safety less.

This man should be elected and paid by the housekeepers themselves, to prevent misapplication and abuse, so much complained of in the distribution of the public money.

He should be allowed ten shillings per annum by each housekeeper, which at forty houses, as above specified, amounts to 20*l.* per annum, almost treble to what is at present allowed; and yet most housekeepers are charged at least 2*s.* 6*d.* a quarter to the watch, whose beat is, generally speaking, little less than the compass of half a mile.

What a shame it is that at least 100*l.* should be collected in some beats, and the poor watchman should not have the one-tenth part of the money? And this I leave to the consideration of any housekeeper who will take the pains to inquire into the extent of a watchman's beat, and after that cast up what is collected in the said beat, as they say for the watch. But this is a small abuse in comparison of other parochial misapplications, for a proof of which I refer my reader to a treatise of mine, entitled, Parochial Tyranny.

This salary of 20*l.* per annum is something of encouragement, and a pretty settlement for a poor man, who with frugality may live decently thereon, and by due rest be enabled to give due and vigilant attendance; that is to say, from evening dusk to morning light.

If a housekeeper break, or a house is empty, the poor watchman ought not to suffer, the deficiency should be made up by the housekeepers remaining.

The watch thus stationed, strengthened, and encouraged, let every watchman be armed with firearms and sword; and let no watchman stand above twenty doors distant from his fellow.

This has already been put in practice in the parish of St. Giles's in the Fields, and has had so good an effect that it is hoped other parishes will follow their example, which redounds not a little to the credit of our project.

Let each watchman be provided with a horn, to sound an alarm, or in time of danger; and let it be made penal, if not felony, for any but a watchman to sound a horn in and about the city, from the time of their going on, to that of their going off.

I know an objection will be here made on account of the postboys, to obviate which, I had thoughts of a bell, but that would be too ponderous and troublesome for a watchman to carry, besides his arms and lantern; whereas a horn is portable, always ready, and most alarming.

Let the postboys therefore use some other signal, since this is most convenient to this more material purpose. They may carry a bell in a holster with ease, and give notice by that, as well as those who collect the letters.

That the watchmen may see from one end of their walks to the other, let a convenient number of lamps be set up, and those not of the convex kind, which blind the eyes, and are of no manner of use; they dazzle, but give no distinct light, and further, rather than prevent robberies. Many persons, deceived and blinded by these *ignes fatui*, have been run over by coaches, carts, &c., people stumbling more, even under these very lamps, than in the dark. In short, they are most unprofitable lights, and, in my opinion, rather abuses than benefits.

Besides, I see no reason why every ten housekeepers cannot find a lamp among themselves, which would be four lamps in a beat, and let their watchman dress it, rather than fatten a crew of directors.

But we are so fond of companies, it is a wonder we have not our shoes blacked by one, and a set of directors made rich at the expense of our very black-guards.

The watch ought to be in view, as well as in the hearing of each other, or they may be overpowered, and much danger may happen.

The streets being thus gloriously illuminated, and so strongly guarded by stout and able fellows, well armed and well paid, all within the view of one another, proceed we to secure all by-turnings, courts, alleys, lanes, &c., which may favour a street-robber's escape, and make our project ineffectual.

A street, court, lane, alley, or other place, where the number of houses or poverty of the inhabitants will not afford a watchman on the terms before mentioned, should be gated in, and the inhabitants let in and out by the watchman of the street.

Where there are even but twelve houses in a court, and the inhabitants people of credit, they may have a separate watch to themselves, as is practised in Boswell-court by Lincoln's-inn-fields, Angel-court in Throckmorton-street, and many other places in London.

This I think an unexceptionable way to secure the cities and suburbs of London and Westminster. The only difficulty I can conceive is, that persons after dark may now and then go a little way round about by keeping the street way, but the pleasantness and safety occasioned by the lights and watch aforesaid, make ample amends. Let those go through byways, and in the dark, whose deeds are so; I am for providing security for honest men, and obstacle for rogues.

And now we have put a stop to their roguery, let us endeavour to suppress the rogues themselves; in order to which I shall begin with their harlots, who are, generally speaking, the first motives to their villany, and egg them on to all manner of mischief.

And these are generally servant wenches, who stroll from place to place, and at last, weary of working, throw themselves on the public. To maintain these creatures, many a man turns rogue. It behoves the

government, therefore, to oblige all young wenches to keep in service. Masters and mistresses ought likewise to see that servants of both sexes go not a rambling when sent to church, but that they keep good hours; for many have been ruined by junketing and staying out, instead of being at church or at home.

Our common women ought to be restrained in the liberties they have lately taken; they openly swear and talk so obscenely, it is a shame to a Christian country.

Having fully handled this topic in two treatises, viz., *Everybody's Business is Nobody's Business*, and *Parochial Tyranny*, I shall not tire my readers with repetition, but referring them to the treatises themselves, return to my subject, which is, —

After we have reformed the ladies, let us take their sparks in hand. And first, let all shoe-cleaners, I mean boys and sturdy vagrants, be suppressed, according to my scheme in *Everybody's Business*, &c.; as for link-boys, alias thieves with lights, there will be no need of them when the streets are illuminated, according to my project.

That sailors as well as soldiers may not give cause of suspicion, it is fit they should also be quartered after the same nature; and more to enforce it, surveyors of quarters should have rounds allotted them.

These surveyors should call at the quarters of every soldier or sailor at a limited hour, to see if they are there or no, and register them at home or absent accordingly; absence to be penal.

Every soldier or sailor leaving his quarters till morning, after he has been found at home and registered, should be punished.

I must be excused if I ward every obstacle, my design being to break up street-robbers, nest and egg.

And that thieves may not stroll about, under pretence of being destitute of lodging, barracks or barns should be built at convenient ends of the town, where all vagrants should be obliged to render themselves at a stated hour, where they should have clean straw allowed them, and be kept orderly and out of harm's way; they may be let loose if they have apparent means of honest livelihood, otherwise they should be sent to the workhouse of their respective parish, or to a

general workhouse, of which there is great need; and of which more hereafter.

All publichouses and gin-shops, if they should be tolerated, should be shut up at ten.

If the government should think fit to tolerate gin-shops, I see no reason why they may not be subject to licenses, and come into the pot-act as well as alehouses; especially considering there is as much gin as ale consumed nowadays.

Night houses and cellars, above all, should be totally suppressed; these are the harbours and refuge of villains and strumpets; these are their houses of call where there hellish trade is carried on; it is here they wait for the signal of their scouts; here they cast their schemes, and bring in advices; here they encourage and initiate young thieves; here they barter and sell their stolen goods; these are their exchanges and asylums after mischief.

Hackney coach drivers next require our care; they are the scum of the people, and, generally speaking, the worst of rogues.

So many and such frequent robberies can never be committed without the connivance of these villains; and it is but too much to be feared, that at the same time they take up a fare they take up a robber, who is ready to mark his prey, and gets up either on the box or behind; and alights at a convenient place to perpetrate his hellish design. As for a 'snack of the coal' as they term it, no doubt but the coachman and he have proper understanding and rendezvous.

Many who go to the coach-office nowadays, may be mistaken in their hopes of redress, not but the commissioners to a man treat complainants with the utmost civility; but the penalty, which used to be on the renter, being now on the driver, the renter or owner of that figure is clear, and the driver has nothing to do but to be absent and laugh at the complainant, an instance of which take in the following case:—

A hackney coachman took eighteenpence of a gentleman for a twelvepenny fare; the gentleman took his number and complained; the driver appeared, and was fined fifteen shillings, but the renter escaped; what was the result? The driver absconded, the gentleman

sits down at his loss of attendance and money; had robbery or assault been the complaint, the consequence had been the same, the gentleman is but where he was. He has since called several times at the office, but to no purpose; all the answer he can get is, the fellow cannot be found. I write this therefore to undeceive those persons, who think when they have taken the number of a coach they can punish the driver for insolence or extortion.

The law in this case ought to be turned into its old channel, that is to say, the owner of the figure should be answerable; he ought to employ a driver he can answer for, or drive himself.

Every renter therefore should be obliged to register, and respond for his driver; or commissioners, figures, and all other forms, are to little purpose.

Beggars should next be suppressed, who lounge about all day, to see where they can steal at night. It is a shame we should suffer real objects of charity to beg; and for those who are not so, it is a shame but they should work.

I shall close all with these observations:—

That the extortions and cabals of tradesmen, by enhancing the prices of provisions, is most detrimental to a state, and worthy the notice of its legislature; for men not being able to support their families by honest labour, and being made beggars by reason of the dearness of provisions, oftentimes grow desperate and turn rogues. This assertion is but too true, to prove which I appeal to the late conduct of

The coal merchants,
The bakers,
The butchers,
And, above all, the tallow chandlers.

The cabals of coal traders have for many years jockeyed us in the price of coals; they have raised and fell them at pleasure, and made mere stockjobbing work of it; but never so much as in his late majesty's reign; on a great impress for seamen, they, in less than a fortnight, raised the price of coals from twenty-three shillings to almost fifty. What a pinch must this be on the poor, who live only from hand to mouth, and buy their coals, poor souls! some by the half peck.

The bakers are yet more flagrant and vile; they turn plenty to famine, and push up the price of bread without rule or reason; they have already been detected in one bite, i.e., procuring some of the fraternity to buy a small quantity of corn much above the market price, and then, by making oath thereof, abuse a well-intended law, and raise the price of bread accordingly.

Thus are the poor ground to dust, in order to fatten a pack of misers, who know no mercy. But I hope the government will make them honest, even against their will.

The butchers are now so extravagant in their way of living, that usual and moderate profit will not content them; they cannot drink malt liquor, and the poor must pay for the wine, which they swill down at an unmerciful rate.

The price of meat should therefore be regulated according to the price of cattle, but not according to the baker's rule afore mentioned.

But as for the tallow-chandlers, their oppressions call aloud for redress. To what an exorbitant pitch have they raised candles; just double what it was some years ago: nay, they threaten to have them at tenpence per pound. How can the poor work when candles are so dear? But we may thank our own luxury for these impositions. I see no reason why we should not humble these upstarts by making our own candles; aye, and our own bread too, as our forefathers have done before us.

The tallow-chandlers, to excuse themselves, lay the fault on the melters. The melters shift it from themselves to the butchers; and so the game goes round.

Oh but, say they, the government will lose part of its revenue: to which I answer, that rather than they shall raise candles to double their value, on pretence of paying a penny per pound excise; in case the parliament will take off the duty on candles for the ease of the poor, I will present them with a project gratis, which shall bring in almost double the money now levied by candles, and that without the least hardship on the subject.

Having, I hope, taken sufficient care of street-robbers, I proceed now to clear the roads from highwaymen, footpads, &c.

Let parties of horse be stationed at all the outgoings from the city of London; so that if a coach, wagon, &c., want a convoy, two, three, or more may be detached by the commanding officer; these shall be registered, and answerable for their charge; and for encouragement shall receive so much per mile, or in the whole, convoy money.

This may be likewise practised from town to town all over England, so that the roads will be as safe as the streets; and they who scruple the trifle of convoy money above proposed, merit not safety.

For those who walk on foot to the adjacent villages, parties of foot may be stationed in like manner; so that not only the subject will be free from danger, but the soldier employed and prevented from corrupt measures by this additional perquisite to his pay.

Nothing remains but that robbers be prosecuted at the public charge; the trials fixed to respective days, that prosecutors may not lose so much time, and the rewards paid in court without deduction or delay; nor should any robber be admitted an evidence after he is taken, or pardoned after conviction.

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