

A Plan of the English Commerce

Daniel Defoe



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Note about the new edition

The present volume has been typeset with modern techniques and for that reason the pagination differs from the original edition. To ease navigation, this New Edition contains a newly compiled *Index* of important topics. It has been painstakingly proofread to ensure that it is free from errors and that the content is faithful to the original, including unusually long chapter headings. In the interest of visual clarity and the minimization of redundancy, the New Edition drops the largely arbitrary italicization of words and applies a modern formatting style to the rudimentary tables found in the original.

Although the text was written in the early 18th century - with all that the fact implies for the vocabulary, spelling, grammar, syntax and idiosyncratic capitalization - the prose is generally accessible to modern readers. For some of the more challenging passages, the following guide to Early Modern English may be helpful:

Barber, Charles. (1997) *Early Modern English*, Second Edition, Edinburgh University Press.

The Publisher

Preface

In a Nation rais'd as we are by Trade, fam'd for carrying on the most extended Commerce in the World, and particularly prosperous in the greatest Undertakings, whether for Improvement at Home or Adventure Abroad, nothing is more wonderful, than to see how ignorant the Generality of our People are about it; how weakly they talk of it, and how little has been made publick for their better Information.

Every Man knows his own affairs, moves in his own Circle, pursues the Mechanism of his own particular Business; but take him out of his Road, he knows nothing of the Reason, or the End of what he is about: The Clothier sorts his Wool, dyes and mixes the Colours; the Comb, the Card, the Wheel, the Loom, are all set on Work by his Direction, and he is call'd a Master of his Art, and he is so; but ask him where his Cloths are sold, by whom bought, to what Part of the World they are shipt, and who are the last Consumers of them, he knows nothing of the Matter; he sends them up to London to the Factor that sells them, whether at Blackwell-Hall, or in his private Warehouse, and when sold, he draws Bills for the Money; there his Circle meets; the Money buys more Wool to be sorted, and comb'd, and spun; and so on, he ends just where he begins, and he begins just where he ended. To talk to him of Trade, Ships, Exportation, Markets Abroad, and Returns in Specie, or in Merchants Goods, tis as much out of his Way, as the Race and the Paddock is to a Carryer's Pack-horse.

The Merchant on the other Hand moves in another Sphere; and he being a Man of Correspondence, besides his own Adventure, receives Commissions from Abroad to buy such and such Goods, and good Remittances by Bills to pay for them, then he ships them according to Order, sends his Invoyses and Bills of Loading by the Post; and there's his Circle finish'd. As to the Wool which is the Principal of the Manufacture; as to the many Hands it goes thro'; how many Thousand Families are employed by it; how the Poor are subsisted, the Provisions consum'd, the landed Interest rais'd, the Nobility and Gentry enrich'd, and the whole Nation supported by the very Goods he buys; he neither knows or concerns himself about it.

The Captains, Masters, Owners, and Navigators of Ships, they move in another Orb, but still act in the same Round of Business; the Ship is built, and fitted out for a Voyage; Thousands of Tradesmen and Workmen subsist upon the petty Demands of the Captain or other Persons who direct the Voyage; the Timber, the Plank, the Iron-Work, the Masts, the Rigging, the Tar and Hemp, the Flax and Oyl, all pass thro' different and numberless Hands, till they center in the Builder's Yard; there the Frame of a Vessel is set on the Stocks. What Hands are then employ'd to creat the beautiful useful Form of a Ship! and what Art to perfect and launch her into the Water!

The Carpenters, Caulkers, Mastmakers, Joiners, Carvers, Painters, Smiths, &c. finish the Hull; the Tradesmen are employ'd to furnish and fit her out; the Sail-Makers, the Rope-Makers, Anchor-Smiths, Block-Makers, Gun-Founders, Coopers, and (for a Thousand small Things too trifling to mention, tho' absolutely needful) the Ship Chandler, and at last the Brewer, Butcher, Baker, &c. for Provision to victual her, all help on the Voyage.

All these supported by that glorious Head of Commerce, called the Merchant, are employed in the Outset of the Ship, but know nothing how to manage the Ship in the Ocean, how to cause her to find her Way on the wild and pathless Surface of the Water; they fit her out, and deliver all to the Commander, &c. But as to the sailing Part, that belongs to another Class of People, called the Sailors or Navigators; and when the Tradesmen have put the Ship into their Hands, their Work is done, till the Ship returns, and then they begin all again: So the Circle is continued, for ever the same.

Again, the Navigator or Commander, he puts up his Ship on the Exchange for such a Voyage, Lisbon, or Cadiz, or Hamburg, or Leghorn; he takes in the Merchants Goods, carries them safe to the delivering Port; he reloads there, and brings back his Cargo; he knows no more; even his Bills of Loading are sign'd, under a needful Profession of his Ignorance, naming the Bulk of what he receives on Board (so many Hogsheads, or Butts, or Bales) but adds the Contents unknown, &c.

When he brings home the Ship, he makes his Report at the Custom-house, and unlivers his Cargo, as they call it; then he receives his Freight, pays his Men, and lays the Ship up, and there's his Circle finish'd; his Sphere of Action, however important, reaches no farther; as to Trade or Commerce, whether general or particular, he knows no more of it than just lies before him.

I might run thro' almost all the Branches of Business, and all the Classes of the Men of Business, and give Examples of the like; but 'tis enough, the Conclusion is short: Hence then a general or universal Plan of Commerce is certainly much wanted in the World.

When we speak of some Men, who are the most acquainted in the World of Business, we say they are Men of a general Knowledge; and such a Man is an universal Merchant; I have indeed heard such Language talk'd among the trading Part of Mankind, but I cannot say that I ever saw the Man.

The Commerce of the World, especially as it is now carried on, is an unbounded Ocean of Business; Trackless and unknown, like the Seas it is managed upon; the Merchant is no more to be follow'd in his Adventures, than a Maze or Labyrinth is to be trac'd out without a Clue.

The Author of this Work is not quite so arrogant, after a Complaint of this Nature, as to tell you he shall present you with this universal Plan, for the whole Trade of the World: It is enough, if he is able to offer a Plan for the Trade of our own Country, in which it is but too true, there are many that talk of the general Commerce to one that understands it.

Nor even in this Plan of our Commerce, does he direct what the Trade of Europe, in general is with us; but what and how great our particular Commerce is; how it is arriv'd to its present Magnitude; how to be maintained and supported in its full Extent; (and which is, or ought to be, the true End of all such Attempts;) How it may yet be improv'd and enlarg'd.

We have loud Complaints among us of the Decay of our Trade, the declining of our Manufactures, and especially of our woollen Manufacture; the contrary of which is, I think, evidently prov'd in this Tract, and the Reasons given for it, will not be easily refuted. It is not any little Negative put upon our Manufactures, as to their Consumption in this or that petty Province or Country in Germany, or else where: Our Manufacture, like a flowing Tide, if 'tis bank't out in one Place, it spreads by other Channels at the same Time into so many different Parts of the World, and finds every Day so many new Outlets, that the Obstruction is not felt; but like the Land to the Sea, what it loses in one Place, it gains in another.

It is plain, the Manufacture cannot be declin'd, if the Quantity of Wool is wrought up, and the Goods are consum'd; on the other Hand 'tis evident, the Consumption of our Manufactures, both abroad and at home, is exceedingly increas'd; the first by the Encrease of our Correspondencies, and the last by the Encrease of our People; and that to such a Degree, as infinitely out-weighs all that can be pretended of the Prohibitions of them in Germany, or the Imitations of them in France; nor are those things able to wound us so deep as our phlegmatick Complainers would insinuate.

But that a full Answer may be given to all they can say of what Loss we yet suffer, and to all they can suggest of what we may suffer hereafter; this Work is calculated, to shew how we may counteract it all at once: Namely, by improving and encreasing our Trade in other Places where those Prohibitions and Imitations cannot reach, and where, if half Europe should drop our Manufacture, which yet 'tis apparent can never happen, we shall raise an equivalent Vent for our Goods, and make Markets of our own; in which the whole World could not supplant us, unless they could subdue us.

This is the Substance of this Tract; 'tis the original Thought which gave Birth to the whole Work; if our Trade is the Envy of the World, and they are conspiring to break in upon it, either to anticipate it, or block it out, we are the more engaged to look out for its Support; and we have Room enough: The World is wide: There are new Countries, and new Nations, who may be so planted, so improv'd, and the People so manag'd, as to create a new Commerce; and Millions of People shall call for our Manufacture, who never call'd for it before.

Nothing is to me more evident, than that the civilizing the Nations where we and other Europeans are already settled; bringing the naked Savages to Clothe, and instructing barbarous Nations how to live, has had a visible Effect already, in this very Article. Those Nations call upon us every Year for more Goods, than they did the Tear before, as well woollen Manufactures, as others. The Portuguese Colonies in the Brazils, and on the East Coasts of Africa, are an unanswerable Proof of this. The European Manufactures now sent to those Colonies, are above five Times as many as were sent to the same Places, about 30 to 40 Years

ago; and yet the European Inhabitants in those Colonies are not encreased in Proportion. We might give Instances of the like in other Places abroad, and that not a few.

New planting Colonies then, and farther improving those already settled, will effectually encrease this Improvement; for like Causes, will have like Effects; Clothing new Nations cannot fail of encreasing the Demand of Goods, because it encreases the Consumption, and that encreased Demand is the Prosperity of our Trade.

Here then is an undiscover'd Ocean of Commerce laid open to us, and some Specimens are offer d, which if entred upon, with the Authority, Power, and Vigor of the Publick, would open such new Channels of Trade among us, as it would be very hard for our Manufacturers to over flock the Market, and as no petty Prohibitions in Europe could flop the Current of.

It is surprizing that in a Nation where such Encouragements are given for planting and improving, where Colonies have been settled, and Plantations made with such Success; where we may truly be said to have filled the World with the Wonders of our growing Possessions, and where we have added not Provinces only, but Kingdoms to the British Dominion, and have launched out even to an Ocean of Commerce. That now, I say, We should, as it were, put a full Stop at once to all our great Designs; check the Humour of Encreasing, and from a kind of a mysterious unaccountable Stupidity turn indolent on a suddain. Not as if we found no more Room to launch out for the Contrary to that is apparent; but as if we had enough, and sought no more Worlds in Trade to conquer.

In all other Cases, and among all other Nations Success encourages Men to go on; encreasing, they endeavour to encrease, *Crescit amor nummi*, &c. - So in Trade, the growing and enlarging the Bounds of a Plantation, the swelling and thriving of Commerce, and the Advantages to the Merchant and Planter in all those Things, certainly encreases the Desire of planting, enlarges the Commerce and fires the Merchant with the Desires of enlarging his Adventures, searching out new Colonies, forming new Adventures, and pushing at new Discoveries for the Encrease of his Trading Advantages.

It is so in other Nations, and it seems wonderful it should not be so here; the Spaniards tho' an indolent Nation, whose Colonies were really so rich, so great, and so far extended, as were enough even to glut their utmost Avarice; yet gave not over, till, as it were, they sat still, because they had no more Worlds to look for; or till at least, there were no more Gold or Silver Mines to discover.

The Portuguese, tho' an effeminate, haughty, and as it were, a decay' d Nation in Trade; yet how do they go on Daily encreasing their Colonies in the Brazils, in Africa, as well on the East Side, as the West? And how do they encrease their Commerce in all those Countries, by reducing the numerous Nations in Melinda, in Zanguebar, in Congo, in Angola, in the Brazils, as well North as South, and every where else, to the Christian Oeconomy, and to the Government of Commerce! by which they subdue whole Nations of Savages to a regular Life, and by that Means bring them to be subservient to Trade as well as to Government.

But how little have we done of this kind? How little have we gain'd upon the Natives of America in all our Colonies? How few of them are brought to live among us, how few to be subject to us! How little Progress of that kind can we boast of? All our Colonies seem to be carried on upon the meer Strength of our own People. Nor can we say we have any one considerable Nation reduced to entire Obedience and brought to live under the Regularity and Direction of a Civil Government, in all our Plantations; a few (very few) in New England only excepted.

As for new Colonies and Conquers, how do we seem entirely to give over, even the Thoughts of them, tho' the Scene is so large, tho' the Variety is so great, and the Advantages so many? On the Contrary, we seem to forget the glorious Improvements of our Ancestors, such as the great Drake, Cavendish, Smith, Greenfield, Somers, and above all, the yet greater Sir Walter Raleigh, upon the Foot of whose Genius almost all the English Discoveries were made, and all the Colonies and Plantations, which now form what they call the English Empire in America were settled and established. These I say we seem to sit down with, as if we had done our utmost, were fully satisfied with what we have, that the enterprising Genius was buried with the old Discoverers, and there was neither Room in the World or Inclination in our People to look any farther.

Whereas on the Contrary, the World presents us with large Scenes of Trade, new Platforms for Business, enough to prompt our Ambition, and even to glut our Avarice; yet we seem to have no Heart for the Adventure.

Nor is there any want of People among us; on the contrary, here are Thousands of Families who want Business, want Employment, want Encouragement, and many that want no Stocks to carry with them, and are ready to go abroad, were the adventuring Spirit reviv'd, and some Men fired with Warmth for the Undertaking, and but vigorous enough to make the Beginning.

This is the Way to raise new Worlds of Commerce, to enlarge and extend new Funds of Trade, to open Doors for an Encrease of Shipping and Manufacture; the Places are so many and the Advantages so great for the making such Attempts; that I say nothing is more wonderful of its kind, than to see how backward we are to push on our own Advantages, and to plant in the most agreeable Climates in the World, in a manner so advantageous as never to be supplanted, and such as should make the English Possessions abroad five Times as Great, as Opulent and as Profitable to Old England, as they have been yet.

The Description of these Places, so proper for Planting, so suited to Commerce, and so qualified to enrich and aggrandize the British Nation, is a Work not only too large for this Trad, but seems not suited to our present Tast; it must lye till the Trading Genius revives and the adventuring Temper is restored among us: Then it will appear, there will neither want Encouragement to such Undertakings or Undertakers to embrace the Encouragements which offer.

As these are Things of the utmost Importance to our Trade in general, and in that to the Prosperity of all his Majesty's Dominions in particular, the Author humbly hopes it shall not be thought assuming, that as we say in our Title, they are humbly refer'd to the Consideration of the King and Parliament; they are

Things worthy of a King, and worthy of a powerful Legislature to consider of; no Power less than that of King, Lords and Commons, can put these Wheels of Improvement into due Motion: And I conclude with an inexpressible Satisfaction, in saying, that as we know his Majesty has the Prosperity of all his Kingdoms at Heart; and will be always ready to listen to reasonable and practicable Proposals for that Purpose; and that the Parliament has always shewn their Readiness to concur in the same just Endeavour; and which is yet more, that the Proposals here offered, and others yet behind, are apparently practicable and rational; it cannot be doubted, but that the Time will come, and is near at Hand, when the Improvement of the British Commerce shall no more appear in Project and Theory, but shew it self in a due and daily Progression, till it compleats the Glory and Prosperity of the whole Nation.

Part I

Chapter 1

Of trade in general

TRADE, like Religion, is what every Body talks of, but few understand: The very Term is dubious, and in its ordinary Acceptation, not sufficiently explain'd. WHEN 'tis particular to a Place, 'tis Trade; when general, 'tis Commerce; when we speak of it as the Effect of Nature, 'tis Product or Produce; when as the Effect of Labour, 'tis Manufacture: In its Management 'tis the same, for when we speak of it in the gross, 'tis wholesale; when of the particulars, 'tis retale; when we speak of Nations, 'tis call'd Corresponding; when of foreign Import only, 'tis called Merchandizing; 'Tis the same also in the Manner, when we exchange Goods, 'tis call'd Barter; when we exchange Coin, 'tis call'd Banking, Negoce and Negotiating; Hence, our Money-Goldsmiths were formerly called Bankers, and our great national Treasury of Commerce is at this Day called the Bank.

THE general heads of Home-Trade are best contain'd in the two plain and homely Terms Labouring, and Dealing. ist. The labouring Part, this consists of Arts, Handicrafts, and all Kinds of Manufactures; and those who are employ'd in these Works, are properly called Mechanicks; they are employ'd, generally speaking, about the first Principles of Trade, (viz.) the Product of the Land or of the Sea, or of the Animals living on both: In a Word, the ordinary Produce of the vegetative and sensative Life; such as Metals, Minerals and Plants, the immediate Produce of Vegetation, or such as Flesh, Skins, Hair, Wool, Silk, &c. grown with, and produc'd by the Animals, as the Effect of sensitive Life.

2. The Dealing Part; this consists of handing about all the several Productions of Art and Labour, when finish'd by the Hand of the industrious Mechanick, and made useful to Mankind; conveying them from Place to Place, and from one Country to another, as the Necessity and the Convenience of the People call for them; and that upon such Terms and Conditions of Delivery, as they can best agree about among themselves, and this is Trade; whether it be carry'd on by the general Medium of all Exchangings call'd Coin, or by something substituted as Coin, and in the room of it, which we call Money.

(N. B. ANY Thing that is by the Authority of a Nation establish'd as the Medium of their Exchanges, is properly the MONEY of the Nation, tho' seldom any Thing but Gold, Silver, or other Metals is call'd COIN.)

THUS Dealing and Manufacturing comprehends all Trade; that is to say, in its meer natural and original Situation; and all the subsequent Divisions and Distinctions of Terms, by which we are taught to express the particular Parts of Trade, are but modern Names introduc'd by Custom, and legitimated by length of Time, and general Usage of the Men of Art, to distinguish Things, as accident and the Variety of the several Productions in Mechanism required.

So the Word GOODS is a general Term, comprehending all the several Kinds and Sorts, whether of Manufactures or Product, that the greatest Dealer in the World can be supposed to Trade in; it is a usual Thing to express it so to this Day, in the Language of Trade; for Example, in retailing, we say, such a Shop is well furnish'd with all Sorts of GOODS: In wholesale Trade, such a Dealer has his Warehouse well fill'd with GOODS: In Housekeeping, all the Furniture of a House are called the GOODS, or the Houshold-goods: In Merchandizing, such a Ship was Loaden with BALE GOODS; and in the East India Ships, after the bulky Goods, (so they call the Pepper, Salt-petre, Red-earth, Tea, and such like) are taken out, it is said the rest of the Loading was made up with PIECE GOODS.

As the Terms in Trade are various, so the People concern'd in Trade bear differing Titles, and are ordinarily known by different Denominations.

THOSE concern'd in the meaner and first Employments, are called in common, Working Men or Labourers, and the labouring Poor; such as the meer Husbandmen, Miners, Diggers, Fishers, and in short, all the Drudges and Labourers in the several Productions of Nature or of Art: Next to them, are those who, tho' labouring perhaps equally with the other, have yet some Art mingled with their Industry, and are to be particularly instructed and taught how to perform their Part, and those are called Workmen or Handicrafts.

SUPERIOR to these, are the Guides or Masters, in such Works or Employments, and these are call'd Artists, Mechanicks or Craftsmen; and in general, all are understood in this one Word Mechanicks; such are Clothiers, Weavers, &c. Handicrafts in Hardware, Brass, Iron, Steely Copper, &c.

SUPERIOR to these are the Dealers who only buy and sell, either by wholesale or retale as above: these are the Factor, the Pedlar, and the Merchant.

ALL these come under the general Denomination of Trading Men, and they are the principal Kinds or Professions which just now carry on the Trade of the World. HAVING thus, once for all, accounted for these several Distinctions, and for the trading People in their respective Denominations as above, we shall have no more Occasion to explain the Terms as we go along, or trouble the Reader with running out to enquire our Meaning, when we speak of the several Branches of Commerce in their proper and particular Distinctions or Terms of Art.

WE must also remove some Scandal out of the Way as we go on, and this is another Difficulty. This Scandal relates to the Dignity, Antiquity, and other Honours due to Trade, and claim'd in its Behalf; concerning which we meet with much weak headed Strife in the World; and which, as I take it, belongs properly to this Place, at least I shall discharge my self of it here, and by doing so, shall have no more Occasion to trouble you with it in the rest of our Debate, however, the impertinent Cavils of the Times may importune me upon that Head.

PRIDE, in Conjunction with abundance of Ignorance, is frequently in Arms against the peaceable trading World about Precedence, and in a Plea of Antiquity: They would divide the World into two Parts only, (viz.) the Gentry and the Commonalty; among the Gentry they rank the Nobility, the ancient Families of Gentlemen, (as they call them) Barons, &c, and those who were formerly called Barons; and with some Difficulty they admit the Men of Learning, and the Men