
The absence of all party spirit in the consideration of historical subjects is a peculiar characteristic of Notes and Queries. Supported by a large body of unconcerted contributors, differing in religion and politics “wide as the poles,” its columns rarely contain even an expression capable of giving offence to any reader. So may it ever be! The whole surface of society is more than sufficient for daily agitation by “unstable wind.” Beneath, where lie scattered “the multitudinous relics of the past,” there is rest; and the gatherers up of “buried treasures” should be reverential, sober men.

This reflection has been induced by the contras between the introduction of the recently discovered letters of Daniel Defoe to the readers of Notes and Queries, and the objectionable manner of their earlier introduction in the London Review.

The following was written before I knew that the letters would be reprinted in Notes and Queries; and I have to thank the Editor for allowing me since to revise.

I propose at present to condense, into as small space as I can, the “history” contained in these letters of Defoe, and to make some remarks on the criticism of the London Reviewer.

What Defoe did, under his engagement with the government, and the morality or otherwise of his conduct, I reserve for another, and I hope shorter communication.

The letters were all written within the space of two months (in 1718), and clearly disprove the statements of his biographers, that his political life closed in 1715. They also point to the materials for an entirely new chapter of the History of Defoe’s Life and Times.

In 1716, Lord Chief Justice Parker urged upon Lord Townshend (then in the ministry) the misrepresentations under which Defoe had suffered; the claims he had upon the government, to which he was sincerely attached; and the valuable services the administration might derive from his pen. They were then much harassed, internally by symptoms of dissension, and externally by attacks from the Tories in public journals, which had become so virulent that not even the king escaped. Lord Townshend sent for Defoe, and proposed to him to write as if still under displeasure, so that he might be more serviceable than by appearing openly in support of the Government. A weekly journal (in opposition to a scandalous paper called Shift Shifted) was first intended, but laid aside; and Defoe engaged himself in Mercurius Politicus. Dyer, the news-letter writer, dying about the same time, Defoe had an offer of a share in the property and its management. Lord Townshend, being made acquainted with the proposal, strongly approved of it, as the publication had been “very prejudicial to the public” (ie. the ministry).

Defoe therefore completed the arrangements, and was still conducting the journal, as part owner and sole manager at the time of writing these letters in 1718. The style of the paper continued Tory, but furious attacks on government, by correspondents, were suppressed; the sting was taken out, the party was amused, and did not set up another paper, which would have destroyed the design.
It does not appear that, in the first instance, Defoe received anything more from the government than a promise that his services should be considered. After a year’s employment, however, in thus moderating party rancour (without compromise or change of the political principles he had always firmly held), he was rewarded by the noble lord with an “appointment” (probably some small sinecure), “with promise of further allowance as service presented.” Shortly afterwards (1717) occurred the defection of Walpole and Townshend from the ministry, and the appointments of Lords Stanhope and Sunderland as their successors. The latter knew Defoe thoroughly, having, when in office many years before, secretly commissioned him to Scotland on government business. Both these noble lords, therefore, approving the “appointment,” continued his services. With Lord Sunderland’s approbation, Defoe now similarly introduced himself into the management of Mist’s Journal, but without any share to the property. Mr Mist was fully aware that he was liable to government prosecution for the violent Tory articles that had appeared in his paper; and convinced that abstention from treason and libel, under Defoe’s advice, saved him from ruin.

Defoe states the abhorrence he feels at all the “traitorous expressions and outrageous words” he has to hear “against his Majesty’s person and government,” and “the scandalous and villanous papers” that come to him for insertion; but by suppression and moderation, he says

“Upon the whole the weekly Journal and Dormer's Letter, as also the Mercurius Politicus, will be always kept (mistakes excepted) to pass as Tory papers, and yet be disabled and enervated, so as to do no mischief or give any offence to the government.”

It is a curious fact, that in the letter of May 23, he wishes the government to know that he had no hand in a paragraph inserted in Mercurius Politicus, from another printed paper, of a person hanged at York for three halfpence. The offensive words were, that it was a piece of justice unmixed with mercy. For reprinting this, Morphew, the publisher, was committed to prison.

In the prefatory remarks of the London Reviewer, Defoe is assailed on account of these letters with the epithets, “baseness and dishonesty”, “if he had any principles”, “rascality”, “dirty and disreputable work”, “a traitor on all sides”, “his death in 1731 in a spunging-house, or something like it”, “dishonest”, “corrupt writer”, “contrived to insinuate himself”, “prostitute.” I leave for others to determine the competency of such a writer - in respect of temper - to deal with a subject of historical interest.

The scope of the London Reviewer is, that Defoe was always universally unpopular with his contemporaries; that he was so because he was utterly dishonest, and worse; that his modern biographers have been unable to offer anything more than speculation and ingenious apologies for him; and that upon this anonymous reviewer (with the key of the letters “now first published”), has devolved the duty of opening the arcanum of Defoe’s inner man, and consigning his memory henceforth to the limbo of perpetual execration.
The reviewer says of Defoe, “As a party-writer he had done much to deserve it, not an iota of favour fell to his lot.” Defoe stood high in the personal favour of King William III, and of Queen Mary, and was both employed and rewarded immediately after the publication of *The True born Englishman* until the death of the king. He stood high in the favour of Queen Anne and of her ministers, Harley and Sunderland, and was employed and rewarded, from early in 1706 to 1709, when his *History of the Union* was dedicated to the Queen. The letters, “now first published,” show him to have been employed and rewarded by the government of King George I. Other occasions of his employment and favour might be mentioned, but these will suffice.

The reviewer goes on:

“His modern admirers, wiser than his contemporary, have discovered that what the latter took for serious was banter; and Defoe’s political writings must be interpreted by the rule of contrary,” &c. “We are inclined to think that his contemporaries were not wrong in their estimate of his character, that what they took to be serious was serious in Defoe’s primary intentions though it afterward suited his purpose, when parties changed, to avoid the charge of tergiversation and political apostacy, to represent his meaning as irony and banter. Gross as this conduct may appear,” &c.

It is scarcely necessary to inform the readers of *Notes and Queries* that the above has reference to the celebrated tract, *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* : considered by many accurate critics, contemporary and modern (including Sir Walter Scott and Charles Lamb), to be the most exquisite piece of irony in the English language.

The above quotation contains a remarkable example of debased criticism:

1. The suggestive: “We are inclined to think.”
2. The assertive: “When parties changed.”
3. The conclusive: “Gross as this conduct may appear.”

The answer is short. Them was no delay or change of parties. The Sacheverellites immediately adopted the pamphlet, as expressing their own views: and this being the mark Defoe aimed at, he as quickly published, to their great consternation, *A Brief Explanation of a late Pamphlet, entituled The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* - showing that it was only a satire on their persecuting principles. Both the *Shortest Way* and the *Explanation* were published in the year 1702.

In order to make Defoe appear “a traitor on all sides,” the *London Reviewer* proceeds to say:

“Walpole and Townshend, by one of those intrigues which prevailed in the time of the first George, were ousted from favour, and Stanhope and Sunderland took their places. To the latter Defoe now addressed himself, avowing his base connection with their rivals, and claiming his promised reward.”
The logical inferences are, that there was a change of government from one great party in the state to its rivals - the opposite. And that Defoe, who had before prostituted his pen for money, in proving that black was white, hastened to offer himself to the new ministry to write for pay that white was black.

Again, the answer is short. Walpole and Townshend (differing from their colleagues as to an appointment) seceded from the government; and Lords Stanhope and Sunderland took the vacant places. It was the same Whig government as before. Its principles remained entirely unchanged, and no alteration was made with respect to the services of Defoe.

A Mr Buckley appears to have been the medium through whom the government communicated its instructions to Defoe; and in the fifth letter, Defoe writes: “The liberties Mr Buckley mentioned, viz. to seem on the same side as before, to rally *The Flying Post*, the Whig writers,” &c.

In the very same column, the *London Reviewer* thus comments:

“For fear his meaning should not be clearly understood, or his services duly valued, Defoe explains his plan of operations more fully. It was ‘to seem to be on the same side as before (that is, the Tories), to rally *The Flying Post* (a Whig journal, honoured with a place in the *Dunciad*), the Whig writers,’” &c.

Having so distorted the instructions received from his employers into Defoe’s own plan of operations, the reviewer concludes: “How much credit is to be attached to the statements of a Writer in his other works against his political and religious opponents, when he could thus prostitute his honour and his talents?”

The premises do not warrant the conclusion. But, as Defoe would have said, “of this in its place.”

Everybody conversant with the history of the reign of Queen Anne, knows that George Lockhart, of Carnwath, is the reputed author of a book called “Memoirs concerning the Affairs of Scotland, from Queen Anne’s Accession to the Throne to the Commencement of the Union,” &c, 8vo. London, 1711.

It is right to say that the author’s name does not appear on the title-page; but the internal and circumstantial evidence is so complete, that it would not have been strengthened by the subscription- of his name in full. I affirm that no other man could have written it, for the following reasons: The Preface states that the book was not intended by its author to be made public until the “obstacle” (the queen) should have been removed (devoutly adding, “and I pray God it may be soon,”) and the king (the Pretender) restored. He was so conscious of its treasonable character, that he adds:

“Common Prudence requires these Memoirs should lie dormant ‘till such be out of a capacity to resent the same, either on Myself or Posterity.”

The Preface goes on to “declare solemnly” the origin of the *Memoirs*:
“I’m now to tell you, having had the Honour to represent one of the Chief Shires in Scotland during the Four last Sessions, I did apply myself to become as useful as I could to my Country … I used, for the most part, to make my remarks on what I thought observable, as they occurred either in or out of the Parliament House … Having followed this method for Four Years (1703 to 1707), I liv’d some time privately at my House in the Country, and thought I could not divert myself to better purpose than by ranging my Notes into Order.”

He states that he knew the rise of the transactions, and was “trusted by the Chief of the Cavaliers, and Country Parties” (meaning the Jacobites and Rebels); and that, in the Memoirs: “I have not spar’d my near Relations, particular Friends, and intimate Comrades, when I thought them Faulty.”

Throughout the whole book the treasonable sentiments of the writer and those of Lockhart are identical.* What the latter said and did, in privacy, is related in full. Whenever Lockhart was present, at the must secret meetings of the traitors, the proceedings are carefully narrated in the Memoirs. The same of his correspondence with St Germains, preparatory to the Pretender's Invasion in 1707. On one occasion, during the opposition to the Union, Lockhart (as a Commissioner) stood perfectly alone; but the Memoir-writer not only endorses his conduct, but explains his motives, and approves. What people told to Lockhart in his own house in the utmost secrecy, and his replies, are contained, apparently verbatim, in the Memoirs. The same may be said of the secret conversations (whilst travelling) between the Duke of Hamilton and Lockhart; and also, between the latter and Captain Straton. Before closing his book, I must quote its author’s opinion of a man, in political principles and conduct as in genius, his antipod: a man who wrote nearly twenty works favouring the Union of England and Scotland; and almost as many against Jacobitism and the Pretender, and in favour of the Revolution, and the succession of the House of Hanover. At page 229 of these Memoirs, Lockhart says

“That vile Monster and Wretch Daniel De Foe, and, other mercenary Fools and Trumpeters of Rebellion, have often asserted that these Addresses, and other Instances of the Nation’s Aversion to the Union, proceeded from the false Glosses and underhand Dealings of those that opposed it in Parliament.”

I now return for the last time to the London Reviewer, who, in a further long paragraph asserts - without even the slightest pretence of evidence - that Defoe himself was the author of these same treasonable Memoirs concerning the Affairs of Scotland; that he collected his observations for the work while employed in Scotland by the Government (in 1706-7), to promote the Union; that the book contains Defoe’s real opinions; that it was not ready for publication until 1714, when the Whigs were in power; and that, therefore

“with a baseness, happily singular in the annals of literature, Defoe printed his work and published it anonymously; but to make his peace with the Whigs, he prefaced it with an introduction, written in the spirit and tone of a Whig.”
The reviewer afterwards, in the same paragraph, quotes from the Introduction; and thereby identifies the book, beyond all question.

The readers of Notes and Queries will form their own conclusions on this, the first part of my self-imposed task.

William Lee

* In this I except the Introduction, as being written by another. – W.L.