

Daniel Defoe, "The True Born Englishman" (1701)

Thus from a mixture of all kinds began,
That het'rogeneous thing, an Englishman:
In eager rapes, and furious lust begot,
Betwixt a painted Britain and a Scot
Whose gend'ring off-spring quickly learn'd to bow,
And yoke their heifers to the Roman plough:
From whence a mongrel half-bred race there came,
With neither name, nor nation, speech nor fame.

In whose hot veins new mixtures quickly ran,
Infus'd betwixt a Saxon and a Dane.
While their rank daughters, to their parents just,
Receiv'd all nations with promiscuous lust.
This nauseous brood directly did contain
The well-extracted blood of Englishmen.
Which medly canton'd in a heptarchy,
A rhapsody of nations to supply,
Among themselves maintain'd eternal wars,
And still the ladies lov'd the conquerors.

The western Angles all the rest subdu'd;
A bloody nation, barbarous and rude:
Who by the tenure of the sword possest
One part of Britain, and subdu'd the rest
And as great things denominate the small,
The conqu'ring part gave title to the whole.

The Scot, Pict, Britain, Roman, Dane, submit,
And with the English-Saxon all unite:
And these the mixture have so close pursu'd,
The very name and memory's subdu'd:
No Roman now, no Britain does remain;
Wales strove to separate, but strove in vain:
The silent nations undistinguish'd fall,

And Englishman's the common name for all.

Fate jumbled them together, God knows how;
What e'er they were they're true-born English now.

The wonder which remains is at our pride,
To value that which all wise men deride.
For Englishmen to boast of generation,
Cancels their knowledge, and lampoons the nation.
A true-born Englishman's a contradiction,
In speech an irony, in fact a fiction.

A banter made to be a test of fools,
Which those that use it justly ridicules.
A metaphor invented to express
A man a-kin to all the universe.

For as the Scots, as learned men ha' said,
Throughout the world their wand'ring seed ha'
spread;
So open-handed England, 'tis believ'd,
Has all the gleanings of the world receiv'd.

Some think of England 'twas our Saviour meant,
The Gospel should to all the world be sent:
Since, when the blessed sound did hither reach,
They to all nations might be said to preach.

'Tis well that virtue gives nobility,
How shall we else the want of birth and blood
supply?

Since scarce one family is left alive,
Which does not from some foreigner derive.

'I only infer that an Englishman, of all men, ought not to despise foreigners as such, and I think the inference is just, since what they are to-day, we were yesterday, and to-morrow they will be like us. If foreigners misbehave in their several stations and employments, I have nothing to do with that; the laws are open to punish them equally with natives, and let them have no favour. But when I see the town full of lampoons and invectives against Dutchmen only because they are foreigners, and the King reproached and insulted by insolent pedants, and ballad-making poets for employing foreigners, and for being a foreigner himself, I confess myself moved by it to remind our nation of their own original, thereby to let them see what a banter is put upon ourselves in it, since, speaking of Englishmen *ab origine*, we are really all foreigners ourselves.'

In his "Explanatory Preface" to the 1703 edition, Defoe defended himself against charges of attacking Englishmen for their nationality when he really meant to satirise their xenophobia. In so doing he made the point that the King was a Dutchman. He did not—and could not—mention that Robinson Crusoe, the hero of his still-unwritten novel of 1719, was the son of a 'foreigner' from Bremen (Germany) and hence called Kreutznaer at birth, as the first chapter tells us.