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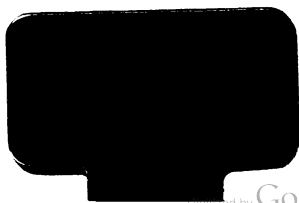
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# THOUGHTS

UPON

# LIBERTY.

BY

*John Wesley.*

AN ENGLISHMAN.

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*I scorn to have my free-born toe  
Dragoon'd into a wooden shoe.*

PRIOR.

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BRISTOL:

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# T H O U G H T S

U P O N

## L I B E R T Y, &c.

1. **A**LL men in the world desire Liberty; whoever breathes, breathes after this: And that by a kind of Natural Instinct, antecedent to Art or Education. Yet at the same time all men of understanding acknowledge, it is a Rational Instinct. For we feel this desire, not in opposition to, but in consequence of, our Reason. Therefore it is not found, or in a very low degree, in many species of Brutes, which seem, even when they are left to their choice, to prefer Servitude before Liberty.

2. The Love of Liberty is then the Glory of Rational Beings: And it is the glory of *Britons* in particular. Perhaps it would be difficult to find any Nation under Heaven, which are more tenacious of it. Nay, it may be doubted, if any

Nation ever was: Not the *Spartans*, not the *Athenians*: No, not the *Romans* themselves, who have been celebrated for this very thing, by the Poets and Historians of all ages.

3. Was it not from this principle, that our *British* Forefathers so violently opposed all foreign Invaders? That *Julius Cæsar* himself, with his victorious Legions, could make so little impression upon them? That, the Generals of the succeeding Emperors, sustained so many losses from them? And that, when at length they were overpowered, they rather chose to lose all they had than their Liberty; to retire into the *Cambrian* or *Caledonian* Mountains, where if they had nothing else, they might at least enjoy their native Freedom?

4. Hence arose the vehement struggles of the *Cambro-Britons*, through so many generations against the yoke, which the *Saxons* first, and afterwards the *English*, strove to impose upon them: Hence the struggles of the *English* Barons, against several of their Kings, lest they should lose the Blessing they had received from their Forefathers. Yea, the *Scottish* Nobles, as all their Histories shew, would no more bear to be enslaved than the *Romans*. All these therefore, however differing from each other in a thousand other respects, agreed in testifying the desirableness of Liberty, as one of the greatest blessings under the sun.

5. Such was the Sense of all our Ancestors,  
even

even from the earliest Ages. And is it not also the General Sense of the Nation at this day? Who can deny, that the whole Kingdom is panting for Liberty? Is not the cry for it gone forth, not only through every part of our vast Metropolis, from the West end of the City to the East, from the North to the South, so that instead of *no complaining in our streets*, there is nothing but complaining: But likewise into every corner of our land, borne by all the four winds of heaven? Liberty, Liberty, sounds through every County, every City, every Town, and every Hamlet.

6. Is it not for the sake of this, that the name of our great Patriot, (perhaps not so admirable in his private Character as *the Man of Rofs*, or so great a Lover of his Country as *Codrus*, or old *Curtius*,) is more celebrated than that of any private man has been in *England* for these thousand years? That his very Picture is so joyfully received, in every Part of *England* and *Ireland*? That we stamp his (I had almost said, adored) Name, on our Handkerchiefs, on the chearful Bowl, yea, and on our Vessels of various kinds, as well as upon our Hearts? Why is all this, but because of the inseparable Connection between *Wilkes and Liberty*? Liberty that came down, if not *fell from heaven*; whom *all England and the world worshipeth*?

7. But mean time might it not be adviseable to consider, (if we are yet at leisure to consider any thing,) What is Liberty? Because it is well



known, the word is capable of various Senses. And possibly it may not be equally desirable in every sense of the word.

8. There are many Nations in *America*, those particularly that border on *Georgia* and *Carolina*, wherein if one disapproves of what another says, or perhaps dislikes his looks, he scorns to affront him to his face; neither does he betray the least dissatisfaction. But as soon as opportunity serves, he steps from behind a tree, and shoots him. And none calls him that does it to an account. No: This is the *Liberty* he derives from his Forefathers.

9. For many Ages the free Natives of *Ireland*, as well as of the *Scottish* Highlands, when it was convenient for them, made an Excursion from their woods or fastnesses, and carried off, for their own proper use, the sheep, and oxen, and corn of their neighbours. This was the *Liberty* which the *Oneals*, the *Campbells*, and many other Septs and Clans, of venerable antiquity, had received, by immemorial tradition, from their Ancestors.

10. Almost all the Soldiers in the *Christian* world, as well as in the *Mahometan* and *Pagan*, have claimed, more especially in the time of War, another kind of *Liberty*: That of borrowing the Wives and Daughters of the men that fell into their hands; sometimes, if they pleaded scruple of Conscience or Honour, using a little necessary Force. Perhaps this may be termed *The Liberty of War*. But I will not positively affirm, that it  
has

has never been used in this free Country, even in the time of Peace.

11. In some Countries of *Europe*, and indeed in *England*, there have been instances of yet another sort of *Liberty*; that of calling a Monarch to account, and, if need were, taking off his head; that is, if he did not behave in a dutiful manner to our Sovereign Lords the People.

12. Now, that we may not always be talking at random, but bring the matter to a determinate point; which of these sorts of *Liberty* do we desire? Is it the first sort? The *Liberty* of knocking on the head, or cutting the throats of those we are out of conceit with? Glorious *Liberty* indeed! What would not King Mob do, to be gratified with it but for a few Weeks? But, I conceive, calm, sensible men do not desire to see them entrusted with it. They apprehend, there might be some consequences, which, upon the whole, would not redound to the prosperity of the nation.

13. Is the second more desirable? The *Liberty* of taking, when we see best, the goods and chattels of our neighbours? Undoubtedly, thousands in the good City of *London*, (suppose we made the experiment here first) would be above measure rejoiced thereat, would leap as broke from chains. O how convenient would it be, to have free access, without any lett or hindrance, to the cellars, the pantries, the larders, yea and the coffers of their rich, overgrown landlords!

But perhaps it would not give altogether so much joy, to the Lord Mayor or Aldermen: No, nor even to those staunch friends of Liberty, the Common Councilmen. Not that they regard their own interest at all: but, setting themselves out of the question, they are a little in doubt, whether this Liberty would be for the good of Trade.

14. Is it then the third kind of Liberty we contend for; the Liberty of taking our Neighbours Wives and Daughters? Ye pretty Gentlemen, ye beaux Esprits, will ye not, one and all, give your voices for this natural Liberty? Will ye not say, "If we cry out against Monopolies of other kinds, shall we tolerate the Monopoly of Women?" But hold. Are there not some among you too, who have Wives, if not Daughters, of your own? And are you altogether willing, to oblige the first Comer with them? I say, the first Comer; for observe! As you are to give the Liberty you take, so you must not pick and chuse your men: You know, by nature, all men are on a level. Liberty! Liberty! No restraint! We are free-born *Englishmen*: Down with the fences! Lay all the inclosures open! No: it will not do. Even Nature recoils. We are not yet polished enough for this:

15. Are we not ripe however for the fourth kind of Liberty, that of removing a disobedient King? Would Mr. *Wilkes*, would Mr. *Horne*, would any free Briton, have any objection to this?

this? Provided only, that, as soon as our present Monarch is removed, we have a better to put in his place. But, who is he? King *John*? That will not sound well, even in the ears of his greatest admirers: And whoever calmly considers the characters and endowments of those other great men, who may think themselves much fitter for the office than his present Majesty, will hardly concur in their opinion: So that a difficulty lies in your way. Whatever claim you may have to this Liberty, you must not use it yet, because you cannot tell where to find a better Prince.

16. But to speak seriously. These things being set aside, which the bawling mob dignify by that name; what is that *Liberty*, properly so called, which every wise and good man desires? It is either *Religious* or *Civil*. Religious liberty is, a liberty to chuse our own Religion, to worship GOD according to our own Conscience, according to the best light we have. Every man living, as man, has a right to this, as he is a rational Creature. The Creator gave him this right, when he endowed him with understanding. And every man must judge for himself; because every man must give an account of himself to GOD. Consequently this is an indefeisible Right: it is inseparable from Humanity. And GOD did never give authority, to any man, or number of men, to deprive any child of man thereof, under any colour or pretence whatever. What an

amazing thing is it then, that the Governing part of almost every nation under heaven should have taken upon them, in all ages, to rob all under their power of this Liberty? Yea, should take upon them at this day so to do! To force Rational Creatures, into their own Religion! Would one think it possible, that the most sensible men in the world, should say to their fellow-creatures, " Either be of my Religion, or I will take away your Food, and you, and your Wife, and Children shall starve? If that will not convince you, I will fetter your hands and feet, and throw you into a dungeon. And if still you will not *see as I see*, I will burn you alive."

17. It would not be altogether so astonishing, if this were the manner of *American Savages*. But what shall we say, if numberless instances of it have occurred, in the politest Nations of *Europe*? Have no instances of the kind been seen in *Britain*? Have not *England* and *Scotland* seen the horrid fires? Have not the flames burning the flesh of Heretics shone in *London* as well as in *Paris* and *Lisbon*? Have we forgot the days of good *Queen Mary*? No: they will be had in everlasting remembrance. And although burning was out of fashion in *Queen Elizabeth's* days, yet hanging, even for religion, was not. It is true, her Successor did not go quite so far. But did even King *James* allow Liberty of Conscience? By no means. During his whole reign, what

what Liberty had the Puritans? What Liberty had they in the following Reign? If they were not persecuted unto death; (although eventually indeed many of them were, for they died in their imprisonment) yet were they not continually harrassed, by prosecutions in the Bishop's Court or Star-chamber? By fines upon fines, frequently reducing them to the deepest poverty? And by Imprisonment for months, yea for years together, till many of them, escaping with the skin of their teeth, left their Country and Friends, and were driven to seek their bread in the wilds of *America*? However, we may suppose, all this was at an end, under the merry Monarch, King *Charles* the Second. Was it indeed? Where have they lived who suppose this? To wave a thousand particular instances; what will you say to those two public Monuments, the Act of Uniformity, and the Act against Conventicles? In the former it is enacted, to the eternal honour of the King, Lords and Commons, at that memorable Period, "Every Parson, Vicar, or other  
 " Minister, whatever, who has any benefice  
 " within these realms, shall, before the next  
 " twenty-fourth of August, openly and publick-  
 " ly declare; his unfeigned Assent and Consent,  
 " to all and every thing contained in the books  
 " of Common Prayer, or shall *ipso facto* be de-  
 " prived of all his benefices! Likewise if any  
 " Dean, Prebendary, Master, Fellow, Chaplain  
 " or Tutor, of any College, Hall, House of  
 " Learning,

“ Learning, or Hospital, any public Professor,  
 “ any other person in holy Orders, any School-  
 “ master, or Teacher, or Tutor in any private  
 “ Family, do not subscribe hereto, he shall be  
 “ *ipso facto* deprived of his place, and shall be  
 “ utterly disabled from continuing therein.”

Property for ever ! See how well *English Property* was secured in those golden days !

So, by this glorious Act, thousands of men, guilty of no crime, nothing contrary either to Justice, Mercy, or Truth, were stript of all they had, of their Houses, Lands, Revenues, and driven to seek where they could, or beg their bread ! For what ? Because they did not dare to worship God according to other men's Consciences ! So they and their Families were at one stroke turned out of house and home, and reduced to little less than beggary, for no other fault, real or pretended ; but because they could not assent and consent to that manner of worship, which their worthy Governors prescribed !

But this was not all. It was further enacted by the same merciful Lawgivers, “ If any person  
 “ act as a teacher, tutor, or school-master, in any  
 “ private family, before he has subscribed here-  
 “ to, he shall suffer three months imprisonment,  
 “ without bail or mainprize.”

Liberty for ever ! Here is security for your *person*, as well as your Property.

By virtue of the Act against Conventicles, if any continued to worship God according to their

OWN

own Conscience, they were first robbed of their Substance, and, if they persisted, of their Liberty; often of their Lives also. For this crime, under this *our most religious and gracious King* (What were they who publickly told God, he was such!) *Englishmen* were not only spoiled of their goods, but denied even the use of the free Air, yea and the light of the Sun, being thrust by hundreds into dark and loathsome Prisons!

18. Were matters much better in the neighbouring kingdom? Nay, they were inexpressibly worse. Unheard-of Cruelties were practised there, from soon after the Restoration till the Revolution.\* What fining, plundering, beating, maiming, imprisoning, with the most shocking circumstances? For a Specimen, look at *Dunnotter Castle*! Where young and old, of both sexes (sick or well, it was all one) were thrust together between bare walls, and that in the heat of Summer, without a possibility of either lying or sitting; yea without any convenience of any kind! till many of them, through Hunger, Thirst, Heat, and Stench, were set at liberty by Death! Considering this; considering how many others were hunted over their native mountains, and shot whenever they were overtaken, with no more Ceremony than beasts: Considering the drowning, hanging, cutting off of limbs, and various Arts of torturing, which were practised by order of King *Charles*, and often in the presence of King *James*,  
who

\* See *Wodrow's History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland*



who seemed to *enjoy* such Spectacles: It would be no wonder, if the very name of an *Englishman* was had in abomination from the *Tweed* to the *Orkneys*.

19. But is this the case at present with *Us*? Are *we* abridged of our Religious Liberty? His late Majesty was desired, about thirty years ago, to take a step of this kind. But his answer was worthy of a King, yea the King of a free people, "I tell you, while I sit on the *English* throne, no man shall be persecuted for conscience sake." And it is certain, he made his promise good from the beginning of his reign to the end. But perhaps the case is altered now. Does his present Majesty tread in his steps? Does *he* persecute no man for conscience sake? If he does, where is the man? I do not ask, Whom has he committed to the flames, or caused to die by the common Hangman? Or, Whom has he caused to die many Deaths, by hunger and thirst, cold and nakedness? But whom has he tortured, or thrust into a dungeon, yea or imprisoned at all, or fined, for worshipping God according to his own Conscience, in the Presbyterian, or any other way? O compare King *Charles*, Gracious *Charles* the Second, with King *George*: And you will know the value of the Liberty you enjoy.

20. In the name of wonder, what religious Liberty can you desire, or even conceive, which you have not already? Where is there a Nation in *Europe*, in the habitable world, which enjoys such

such Liberty of Conscience as the *English*? I will be bold to say, there is nothing like it in *Holland*, in *Germany* (Protestant or Popish,) in either the Protestant or Popish Cantons of *Switzerland*; no, nor in any country under the Sun. Have we not in *England* full liberty to chuse any Religion, yea, or no Religion at all? To have no more Religion—than a Hottentot shall I say? Nay, no more than a bull or a swine? Whoever therefore in *England* stretches his throat, and bawls for more Religious Liberty, must be totally void of shame, and can have no Excuse but want of understanding.

21. But is not the ground of this vehement Outcry, That we are deprived of our Civil Liberty? What is *Civil Liberty*? A Liberty to enjoy our Lives and Fortunes in our own way: to use our Property, whatever is legally our own, according to our own choice. “And can you deny, that we are robbed of this Liberty?” Who are? Certainly I am not. I pray, do not face me down that I am: Do not argue me out of my senses. If the *Grand Turk*, or the King of *France*, wills that a man shall die, with or without a cause, die he must. And instances of the kind continually occur: But no such instances occur in *England*. I am in no more danger of death from King *George*, than from the Queen of *Hungary*. And if I study to be quiet and mind my own business, I am in no more danger of losing my Liberty than my Life. No, nor my property;

property; I mean, by any act of the King. If this is in any degree invaded, it is not by the King, or his Parliament, or Army; but by the good Patriots.

Hark! Is Hell or Bedlam broke loose? What roaring is that, loud as the waves of the sea?  
 "It is the Patriot Mob." What do they want with me? Why do they flock about my House?  
 "Make haste! Illuminate your windows, in honour of Mr. *Wilkes*." I can't in conscience: I think it is encouraging vice. "Then they will all be broken." That is, in plain *English*, Give them twenty shillings, or they will rob you of five pounds. Here are Champions for the laws of the land! For Liberty and Property! O vile Horse-guards!

"That dared, so grim and terrible, to advance  
 "Their miscreated fronts athwart the way!"

True, they did nothing, and said nothing. Yet (in default of the Civil Powers, who did not concern themselves with the matter) they hindered the Mob from finishing their work.

22. Why then these men, instead of any way abridging it, plainly preserved my Liberty and Property. And by their benefit, not the Care of those to whom it properly belonged, I still enjoy full Civil Liberty. I am free to live in every respect, according to my own choice. My Life, my Person, my Property, are safe. I am not murdered,

murdered, maimed, tortured at any man's pleasure: I am not thrown into prison. I am not manacled: See, I have not one fetter, either on my hands or feet. And are not *you* as *free* as I am? Are not you at liberty to enjoy the fruits of your labours? Who hinders you from doing it? Does King *George*? Does Lord *North*? Do any of his Majesty's Officers or Soldiers? No, nor any man living. Perhaps some would hinder you, if you acted contrary to Law: But this is not Liberty; it is Licentiousness. Deny the fact who can: Am not I free to use my substance according to my own Discretion? And do not *you* enjoy the self-same Freedom? You cannot, nor dare not, deny it. At this hour I am at full liberty, to use my Property as I please. And so are *You*: You do, in fact, use your House, your Goods, your Lands, as is right in your own eyes. Does any one take them from you? No; nor does any one restrain you from the full enjoyment of them. What then is the matter? What is it you are making all this pother about? Why are you thus wringing your hands, and screaming, to the terror of your quiet neighbours, "Destruction! Slavery! Bondage! Help, Countrymen! Our Liberty is destroyed! We are ruined, chained, fettered; undone!" Fettered! How? Where are the fetters, but in your own imagination? There are none, either on your hands, or mine. Neither you nor I can shew to any man in his senses, that

that we have one chain upon us, even so big as a knitting-needle.

23. I do not say, that the Ministry are without fault; or that they have *done all things well*. But still I ask, What is the Liberty which we want? It is not Civil or Religious Liberty. These we have in such a degree as was never known before, not from the times of *William the Conqueror* \*. But all this is nothing: This will never satisfy the *bellua multorum capitum*. That many-headed beast, the People, roars for Liberty of another kind. Many want *Indian Liberty*, the liberty of cutting throats, or of driving a brace of balls through the head of those ugly-looking fellows, whom they cannot abide the sight of. Many more want the old *High-land Liberty*, the convenient Liberty of plundering. Many others there are, who want the *Liberty of War*, of borrowing their Neighbour's Wives or Daughters. And not a few (though they do not *always* avow it) the *Liberty of murdering their Prince*.

24. If you are a reasonable man, a man of real Honour, and consequently want none of these, I beg to know, What would you have? Consider the thing calmly. What Liberty can you reasonably desire, which you do not already enjoy? What is the matter with you? And with multi-

\* If the famous *Middlesex Election* was an exception to this; yet observe, One Swallow makes no Summer.

multitudes of the good people, both in *England* and *Ireland*? That they are crying and groaning, as if they were chained to an oar, or barred up in the dungeons of the Inquisition! The plain, melancholy truth is this: There is a general Infatuation, which spreads, like an overflowing stream, from one end of the land to the other. And a man must have great Wisdom and great Strength, or he will be carried away by the torrent. But how can we account for this Epidemic Madness? For it deserves no better name. We must not dare to give the least intimation, that the Devil has any thing to do with it. No! This *enlightened age* is too wise to believe that there is any Devil in being. Satan, avaunt! We have driven thee back into the land of shadows. Keep thou among thy own kindred:

“With Hydra’s, Gorgons, and Chimera’s dire.”

Suppose it then to be a purely natural Phænomenon: I ask again, How can we account for it? I apprehend, if we could divest ourselves of Prejudice, it might be done very easily: And that, without concerning ourselves with the hidden Springs of Action, the motives or Intentions of men. Letting these alone, is there not a visible, undeniable Cause, which is quite adequate to the effect? The good People of *England* have, for some years past, been continually fed with Poi-  
son

son. Dose after dose has been administered to them, for fear the first, or second, or tenth, should not suffice, of a poison whose natural effect is, to drive men out of their senses. "Is the *Centaur* not fabulous?" Neither is *Circe's Cup*. See how, in every County, City, and Village, it is now turning quiet, reasonable men, into wild bulls, bears, and tigers! But, to lay Metaphor aside, how long have the *public Papers* represented one of the best of Princes as if he had been one of the worst, as little better than *Caligula*, *Nero*, or *Domitian*? These were followed by *Pamphlets* of the same kind, and aiming at the same point, to make the King appear odious, as well as contemptible, in the eyes of his subjects. *Letters* succeed, wrote in fine Language, and with exquisite art; but filled with the Gall of bitterness. "Yes, but not against the King; *Junius* does not strike at *Him*, but at the evil Administration?" Thin pretence! Does not every one see the blow is aimed at the King, through the sides of his Ministers? All these are conveyed, week after week, through all *London* and all the Nation. Can any man wonder at the effect of this? What can be more natural? What can be expected, but that they who drink in these Papers and Letters with all greediness, will be thoroughly embittered with and inflamed thereby? Will first despise and then abhor the King? What can we expect, but that

by

by the repeated doses of this poison they will be perfectly intoxicated, and only wait for a convenient season to tear in pieces the Royal Monster (as they think him) and all his Adherents?

25. At present there are hindrances in the way, so that they cannot use their teeth as they would. One is, an untoward Parliament, who *will not* look upon the King with the same eyes that they do; but still think he has no more desire to enslave the nation, than to burn the city of *London*. A still greater hindrance is The Army: Even Lions and Bears do not chuse to encounter Them, so that these men of War do really at this time preserve the Peace of the nation. What then can be done before the People cools, that this precious opportunity be not lost? What indeed, but to prevail upon the King to dissolve his Parliament and disband his Army? Nay, let the Parliament stay as it is; it will suffice to disband the Army. If these Red-coats were but out of the way, the Mob would soon deal with the Parliament. *Probatum est*: Nothing is more easy than to keep *malignant members* from the House. Remember Lord *North* not long ago; this was a taste, a specimen of their activity. What then would they not do if they were Masters of the field, if none were left to oppose them? Would not the Avenues of both Houses be so well guarded,



ed, that none but *Patriots* would dare to approach?

26. But (as often as you have heard the contrary affirmed) King *George* has too much understanding, to throw himself into the hands of those men who have given full proof that they bear him no great Good-will. Nor has he reason to believe that they are much more fond of his Office than of his Person. They are not vehemently fond of Monarchy itself, whoever the Monarch be. Therefore neither their good nor ill words will induce him, in haste, to leap into the fire with his eyes open.

27. But can any thing be done to open the eyes, to restore the senses, of an infatuated nation? Not unless the still-renewed, still-operating Cause of that infatuation can be removed. But how is it possible to be removed, unless by restraining the licentiousness of the Press? And is not this Remedy worse than the Disease? Let us weigh this matter a little. There was an antient Law in *Scotland*, which made *Leasing-making* a capital Crime. By *Leasing-making* was meant, Telling such *wilful lies*, as tended to breed dissention between the King and his Subjects. What pity but there should be such a Law enacted in the present Session of Parliament? By our present Laws a man is punishable for publishing even truth, to the detriment of his Neighbour. This I would not wish. But should he

He not be punished, who publishes palpable lies? And such lies as manifestly tend to breed diffention between the King and his Subjects? Such, with a thousand more, was that bare-faced lie of the King's *bursting out into laughter* before the City Magistrates! Now does not the publisher of this lie deserve to lose his ears more than a common knight of the post? And if he is liable to no punishment for a crime of so mischievous a nature, what a grievous defect is this in our law? And how loud does it call for a remedy?

28. To return to the point whence we set out. You see whence arose this outcry for Liberty, and these dismal complaints that we are robbed of our Liberty echoing through the land. It is plain to every unprejudiced man they have not the least foundation. We enjoy at this day throughout these kingdoms such Liberty, Civil and Religious, as no other Kingdom or Common-wealth in *Europe*, or the world enjoys: And such as our Ancestors never enjoyed from the Conquest to the Revolution. Let us be thankful for it to God and the King! Let us not, by our vile Unthankfulness, yea, our Denial that we enjoy it at all, provoke the King of Kings to take it away. By one stroke, by taking to himself that Prince whom we know not how to value, He might change the scene, and put an end to our Civil as well as Religious Liberty. Then would be seen who were Patriots,  
and

and who were not; who were real Lovers of Liberty and their Country. The GOD of Love remove that day far from us! Deal not with us according to our deservings; but let us know, at least in this our day, the things which make for our peace!

*March 10, 1772.*

F I N I S .



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