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THE  
*Tiverton* Wool-combers  
**DEFENCE:**

In Answer to  
A LETTER, sign'd, A Neuter.  
Published in the *General-Evening-Post* of  
December 28, 1749.

More particularly,  
In respect to the Slavish Principles advanced by the AUTHOR, in advising the Parliament to take away from the Manufacturers of *Great-Britain* a Privilege allowed to all Mankind, even under the most arbitrary Governments, viz. That of uniting into Clubs and Societies for their mutual Benefit; which, if it passes into a Law, must necessarily make them greater Slaves, than any under the most despotic Governments.

With some REFLECTIONS on calling in the Military Force, in the late Affair at *Tiverton*.

By One Unconcern'd, but a Friend to Liberty.

L O N D O N:  
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T H E  
*Tiverton* WOOL-COMBERS  
 D E F E N C E .



THE Almighty Creator of the Universe, whose Goodness is over all his Works, created all Men at first upon a perfect Equality; he seems to have ordained their all springing from one Man, (instead of creating Millions of Men at once, which was equally easy to his Power) to impress deeply upon them that useful Lesson, *That they were all Brethren.* But Ambition soon aspiring to rule over others, and Pride to set its Foot upon the Neck of the Weak, God himself became the Advocate for the Oppressed, and took their Cause into his own Hands. When therefore he had delivered the People of Israel from their Egyptian Task-Masters, he seems to have inculcated nothing more strongly

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in the Laws he gave them, than a *Regard* for the *Poor* and *Needy*, the *Servant* and *Hireling*; every good Heart must needs feel the most exalted Notions of the eternal Goodness of the Divine Being, when it reflects upon that more than paternal Tenderness, which she has shewn for *Those* whom even the Great ones of the Earth spurn and trample upon. It would be endless to enumerate all the kind Laws he enacted in their Favour, and the strong Barriers he set to Power and Oppression, to preserve the Divine Right of Liberty even to the poorest of Mankind; thus how beneficial is that Law enacted, *Leviticus* xix. 9, &c. And when ye reap the Harvest of your Land, thou shalt not wholly reap the Corners of thy Field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy Harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy Vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every Grape of the Vineyard, thou shalt leave them for the Poor and the Stranger. And again, *Exodus* xxiii. 10, &c. Six Years shalt thou sow thy Land, and gather in the Fruits thereof; but the seventh Year thou shalt let it rest and lie still; and that which groweth of its own accord thou shalt not reap, but leave it, that the Poor of thy People may eat; and what they leave, the Beasts of the Field shall eat, in like Manner thou shalt deal with thy Vineyards and with thy Olive Yard. In *Deuteronomy* xv. 1. there are several gracious Laws in their Favour, At the End of every seven Years thou shalt make a Release. And this is the Manner of the Release: Every Creditor that lendeth ought unto his Neighbour, shall release it; he shall not exact it of his Neighbour, or of his Brother, because it is call'd the Lord's Release. And if thy Brother be sold unto thee, and serve thee six Years; then in the seventh Year thou shalt let him go free from thee. And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty; thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy Flock, and out of thy Floor, and out of thy Wine Press; of that wherewith the Lord thy God hath blessed thee, thou shalt give unto  
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And again, in *Leviticus* xxv. 10. There is still a stronger Law in their Favour, which seems design'd as an effectual Barrier against the Power of the Great. And ye shall hallow the fiftieth Year, and proclaim Liberty throughout all the Land unto all the Inhabitants thereof; it shall be a Jubilee unto you, and ye shall return every Man unto his Possession, and ye shall return every Man unto his Family. As by this Law, all Purchasers of Land and Possessions from their poor Brethren became void in the Space of fifty Years, and they returned to their former Owners, it naturally preserved that due Balance between the Rich and Poor, which is the firmest Pillar of Liberty.

In *Leviticus* xxv. 35. There is another Barrier from Oppression; And if thy Brother be waxen poor, and fallen into decay with thee; then thou shalt open thine Hand wide, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his Need, in that which he wanteth, Thou shalt not give him thy Money upon Usury, nor lend him thy Victuals upon Increase.

In *Deuteronomy* xxiv. 14. it is said, Thou shalt not oppress a hired Servant that is poor and needy; at his Day thou shalt give him his Hire, neither shall the Sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and setteth his Heart upon it.

In every Part of Scripture we find the Divine Being enforcing the fulfilling of these paternal Laws, with the same Zeal and Tenderness as he enacted them, and frequently thus expostulates with the Great ones of Israel. The Lord will enter into Judgment with the Ancients of his People, and the Princes thereof; for ye have eaten up the Vineyard, the Spoil of the Poor in your Houses. What mean ye, that ye beat my People to Pieces, and grind the Faces of the Poor? *Isaiah* iii. 14, and 15. Wo unto him that useth his Neighbours Service without Wages and giveth him not for his Work; *Isaiah* xxii. 13. Is not this the Fast that I have chosen to undo the heavy Burdens, and to let  
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*the oppressed go free; and that ye break every Yoke; Isaiah lviii. 6.* It may be perhaps said, that the Divine Being intended these Laws for the People of the *Jews* only; but if we reflect that they are of a moral Nature, and of Consequence unchangable and perpetual, we must needs allow that the Spirit of them ought always to exist, though outward Circumstances may blot out the Letter of them; and that from hence we may conclude, that no Man (considered only as a Subject of the Divine Being) has a Right to oppress the poorest of his Brethren. It was such Reflections as these, and that honest Indignation which ought to arise in the Breast of every *Englishman*, when he sees any Attempt made to oppress or enslave even the poorest of his Fellow-Freemen, that has engaged one quite unconcerned to become an Advocate for the Poor, in Answer to the Arbitrary Proposal referred to the Consideration of the Parliament, in a Letter inserted in the *General Evening Post*, December 28, 1749, in regard to the late Proceedings of the Wool-combers at *Tiverton*, in *Devon*.

As the Writer of this Defence is at too great a Distance from the Spot to make a particular Enquiry into the Affair; he will take for granted that the Letter-Writer above-mentioned, has given a candid and impartial Representation of it; he shall therefore give it in his own Words, and then make some few Remarks to shew, that allowing all he has asserted in regard to that Affair to be true, it can by no Means justify, or excuse the arbitrary and cruel Proposal he has made to Parliament.

COPY

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COPY of a LETTER, inserted in the *General-Evening-Post*, December 28, 1749, signed, A NEUTER.

SIR,

*Tiverton*, Dec. 14. 1749.

“As the Disorders that have lately happened here in relation to the Woolen Manufactory, the Elopement of the Wool-combers, and the Stagnation of the Trade of this Town, subsequent thereto, and which still continues, may be misrepresented by some, and misunderstood by others; 'tis therefore to do common Justice to all the Parties interested therein, that the following Account of the several Facts, is written in order to be translated through your Hands to the Public.

I. **W**HEN the Merchants of this Place had determined to introduce the *Irish* Worsted, and the Wool-combers knew positively, that several Weavers were employed in manufacturing the same, they immediately returned all their Work to their several Masters, took away the Pads out of the Comb-Shops, and declared they never would comb again, 'till the *Irish* Worsted was thrown quite out. A special Meeting was likewise had of their whole Club, wherein it was determined, to subsist themselves out of the common Club-Stock, 'till the Weavers should starve, or the Merchants and Serge-Makers comply. On the other Hand, the Weavers as obstinately resolved rather to die, than give up the *Irish* Worsted.

II. This being the Case, and their Funds beginning to sink, and not the least Appearance of a Compromise; Letters were dropt, threatening some of the Merchants with Death, and their Houses with Fire,

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Fire, unless they would consent to part with the Worsted. Upon which, it was thought adviseable to march a Company of Soldiers hither, in order to awe the Licentious, and to protect the Trader in his Person, Property, and Trade; for how little soever the Gentlemen, mentioned in those incendiary Letters, might be terrified thereby, yet Crimes like these are not to be connived at, or the daring Offender pass unobserved.

III. For some Time after the Arrival of the Soldiers all Things continued quiet; 'till one Day, the Woolcombers being assembled in full Club, at their House in the *Fore-Street*, unluckily a Body of the Weavers came by, when Words began to rise, and Blows to be exchanged; the Shops were all shut up, and a dreadful Battle ensued. The Mayor, upon the first Notice of it, summoned his Officers and attempted to read the *Riot Act*: The *Riot Act* was contemned, and the Magistrate insulted; the Soldiers were then called in, and the Act was read, and thereupon both Parties dispersed, vowing Vengeance on each other.

IV. Many Schemes have been offered to Parliament for preventing the Exportation of *Irish* Wool to foreign Parts: Now what can more effectually put a Stop to this Practice, than the *English* buying it up themselves? And though *Tiverton* may make but a small Figure in a Map of *England*, yet is its *Dutch* and *Flanders* Trade the most considerable of any Town in *England*, and might be of great Consequence to *Ireland*, in taking off some of its Wool work'd into Worsted, provided the Poor could be taught to think justly and act reasonably; for it is allowed, even by the Woolcombers themselves, that five Packs of *Irish* Wool, worked into Worsted, might be manufactured Weekly here, without any Detri-  
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ment to their Labour, and with a great deal of Profit to the Merchant; but say they, "Should we suffer such a Novelty to be introduced, the Merchants would be Masters, and by Degrees we should have another *Norwich* arise here." To obviate which Objection, the Merchants and Serge-Makers agreed under their Hands, to fix the *Irish* Manufactory to Twenty Pieces a Week, and to throw out even those Twenty Pieces whenever it should appear to hurt the Woolcomber in his Work, or to prejudice the *Dutch* Trade in general; and by the same Instrument promised to retain so much of the Work within the Town, which is now scatter'd about the Country Villages as should keep the Labourer constantly employ'd. So that by this Regulation, the Woolcomber and Weaver would never want Labour; the Town which has been sinking for some Years, would again recover its Splendor; our Poor would be lessen'd, some Part of our *Irish* Wool would be kept from *France*, and the Merchants (the Glory of *Great-Britain*) be enabled to live with Dignity, to answer their Orders, and thereby to support the Trade, the Honour, and the Interest of the Nation. But as this, and every other Expedient was refused by the Wool-combers (who absolutely declared that they would not permit any Quantity of *Irish* Worsted whatsoever to be worked within the Town) the Merchants and Makers resolved not to recede, in any one Point, from their last mentioned Proposals, wisely judging that this Strife was for the Mastery, and that the least Concession more from them would be meanly submitting to a Mob, and a Foundation for future Disputes.

V. Upon which, the Combers determined to remove from hence; and actually did so, leaving their Wives and Children likely to become chargeable to the Parish. — An Action, contrary to the Laws of

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Nature

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Nature, of Society, and of revealed Religion; and an Offence, which is very justly punishable by an Act of Parliament made in the thirteenth Year of his present Majesty, entitled, *the Vagrant Act*; for what can excuse that in a Man, which would be deemed unnatural even in a Brute?

VI. Surprising will it appear to the Reader, that a Body of One or Two Hundred Men should be actuated with the same Motives, and guided by the same Principles; but if he considers that they are joined in a Club, where every Matter of Importance to them is debated, and every Resolution there taken is maintained by the several Members of that Club, his Astonishment will cease. These Clubs were at first formed for the Support of its Members in Sickness or old Age, but are now become the great Sources of Tumult and Sedition, of Rage and Riots; 'Tis by these that our Laws are trampled upon, and our civil Properties invaded; from thence Parties are made that commit all Manner of Outrage, and Schemes are hatch'd, that end in Bloodshed and Confusion. 'Tis this Attachment to their Clubs which enables them to injure Trade, and violate Order and good Government; for by an Article which runs through every Woolcomber's and Weaver's Club in *England*, it is provided, that any Weaver or Woolcomber, having a Certificate from the Club to which he belongs, mentioning the Reasons of his leaving his own Place of Abode, whether it be for Want of Work, or a Refusal to work, in Obedience to his Club, shall be subsisted for one Night in every Town where there is a Club-House, during the Time he continues to travel, or until he has Employment again.

VII. This

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VII. This is the State of the Case at this Time, and this is now humbly represented to the Public by one who has no Interest in either Party, having no Concern in any Woolen Manufactory whatsoever; but gives himself the Trouble to set these Facts in a true Light, that the Publick may judge, unprejudiced, of the Necessity there was of supporting the Civil Government of *Tiverton* by the Military. And it is with the greatest Humility, and most profound Submission, that the Author of this Tract refers it to the Consideration of our Nobles and Commons now assembled in Parliament. "Whether the Dissolution of every Woolcomber's and Weaver's Club in this Kingdom would not tend greatly to the Advancement of Trade, and the Suppression of Riots in general."

I am,

S I R, Yours.

A NEUTER.

The impartial Eye of Reason cannot see any Thing unnatural or riotous in what is related in the first Paragraph of this Letter, but rather what is consistent with the natural Freedom of all Mankind; the Merchants it seems, had resolved, and actually did introduce into the Town Wool-worked into Worsted in a foreign Country (for so *Ireland* must be considered in Respect to a natural born *Englishman*) in order probably, to save something in the Charge of manufacturing it: If therefore, there were before any mutual Connexions and Dependencies between the Merchants and the Wool Combers; the Merchants themselves dissolved them, by being the first Aggressors; and the Wool-Combers had an undoubted Right to choose whether

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whether they would work or not; and to subsist themselves out of their common Stock; In the second Paragraph, we have indeed a more severe Charge against them, but at the same Time I acknowledge them culpable; the *Spirit of Liberty* bids me say, their Opposers were infinitely more so; for it seems according to the Letter-Writer, that when the Funds of the Wool-combers began to sink, Letters were dropt threatening some of the Merchants with Death, and their Houses with Fire, unless they would consent to part with the Worst; I own this Proceeding is no Ways justifiable, but every Man of Sense knows, these Letters are mere *Bugbears*, and not once in a thousand Times put in Execution, and perhaps never intended to be so; and yet it was immediately thought advisable to march a Company of Soldiers hither, in order to awe the Licentious; and to PROTECT the Trader in his Person, Property and Trade; O lamentable Ruins of unhappy England! let Tears run down like a River Day and Night, give no Rest, let not the Apple of thine Eye cease: Are thy venerable Laws which once could hold Kings in Chains, and Nobles in Fetters of Iron, become a feeble REED shaken by every WIND? Alas! alas! has thy TRADE, thy PROPERTY, thy SONS, no PROTECTION left but from the rugged HANDS of Military POWER? If this be so, O that I had in the Wilderness a Lodging-Place, that I might leave my People and go from them. Strangers and Foreigners will undoubtedly imagine there was no civil Magistrate in the Place at that Time: O that Truth would permit me to hide the Shame of my Countrymen! But it obliges me to confess there was a Mayor, who has Power to try Offenders at a Common Council, a Town Clerk, besides other inferior Magistrates and Officers. It would never have enter'd into my Head, nor should I have credited the Report, had not the Letter-Writer own'd it, that a populous Town, consisting of several Thousand Inhabitants, and a considerable

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considerable Body of Merchants, should call in the Assistance of a Military Power to allay their dreadful Fears of a Body of one or two Hundred Men, even before they had committed any Outrage, especially as it is to be supposed the Merchants would have been supported by their good Friends and Allies, the Weavers, who, we find afterwards, were by themselves a pretty equal Match for the Combers. As the Author of the Letter makes an Appeal to the Judgment of the Publick, about the Necessity there was of supporting the Civil Government of *Tiverton* by the Military, I hope he will excuse me, if, as a Member of the Publick, I assert (and I believe every Lover of Liberty will join with me) that there was so far from being a Necessity, that there was scarce a legal Pretence for it; for it is inherent in the very Constitution of every free Government, that the Military Power, if ever, should not be call'd in but upon the most urgent Occasions, and when all the Force of Civil Government hath been exerted without Effect; but in the present Affair, this was so far from being the Case, that there was no Riot, no Tumult, no Attempt of Outrage committed against any one, when the Military Power was called in: but only a few idle Letters dropp'd in the Streets, which no Body was bold enough to own; the real Authors of which, if discovered, were liable to be punished by the Civil Government; so that at least, till some formidable Preparations had been made, or some Indications shewn, of putting these Threats into Execution, there could not be the smallest Pretence for calling in the Military Government; for whatever Opinion the Letter-Writer may be of, every true-born Son of Freedom will always think, that whoever calls in a Military Force to awe and chastise a Son of Liberty, unless upon the most urgent Necessity, heinously offends against the common Liberties of all his Fellow-Denizens, and justly merits a worse than Egyptian Bondage: For he, in fact

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fact, by such a Proceeding, gives his Vote, and does as much as lies in his Power to enslave himself and Fellow Countrymen: For what can that Man expect, who wantonly calls in the military Power to chastise any of his Fellows, when they exert themselves to withstand some Oppression or Grievance; but that, in Process of Time, under some arbitrary Prince (if any such should ever happen to sit on the Throne of *Britain*) that very Power will be made use of to chastise his Posterity, if they should ever nobly exert themselves, to defend any of those Privileges they were so happy to be born Heirs to? For it is equally easy to give the Title of Mob and Rioters to those, who, like noble Spirits, stand up in Defence of their just Privileges; as to those whom Licentiousness excites to Commotion for the Sake of Plunder and Rapine. I shall not take upon me the Defence of what is called a *Mob*; but the little Knowledge I have of History has informed me, that those who are called so, (I mean, the common People) have been, under all Governments, the most strenuous Asserters, and the most open Defenders of public Liberty; for the Great (except a few choice Spirits) have generally either too much Indolence, or too much to risk, to become the open Defenders of Liberty, so that tho' they may perhaps secretly manage the Springs, yet the common People have always had the Honour of charging in Front, and openly demanding what the others only dared to wish for. All Methods therefore of extinguishing or damping this Spirit in them, except by the Power of the Civil Magistrate (which I would have always strenuously exerted upon these Occasions) must in the End prove destructive to the Cause of Liberty, and justly entail the Curse of all Posterity upon those who call in unconstitutional Power to damp this noble Ardor.

The 3d Paragraph of the Letter contains HORRIDA BELLA. It seems, the Wool-combers being assembled peace-

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peaceably together, a Body of the Weavers unluckily passed by; the Sight of their false Brethren so inflamed the Combers, that from Words they proceeded to Blows, and a DREADFUL BATTLE ensued; (but we have not yet received any Lists of the Slain or Wounded) the Mayor was insulted; but in what Manner, or by whom, we cannot tell: The Proclamation was read; but the Noise, Tumult, and Confusion which must necessarily attend so DREADFUL a BATTLE, we suppose, prevented them from hearing it; so that at length, the armed Gentlemen were let loose upon the poor unarmed Weavers and Combers, which soon occasioned a Retreat to be sounded by both Parties: But in all this DREADFUL TUMULT and BATTLE, we have the Satisfaction to observe, not the least Attempt of Outrage was made upon the Persons or Property of any of the Inhabitants.

I shall say nothing to so much of the 4th Paragraph as relates to the great Benefit it would be to the Nation to export Worsted from *Ireland*, because I must confess, I don't understand it; I shall only remark, that the Letter-Writer makes *Tiverton*, in one Place, the most considerable Town in *England* for its *Dutch* and *Flanders* Trade; and a few Lines after, tells us, it has been a sinking Town for some Years, which seems a little irreconcilable: I must likewise be so free to tell him, that if it gets no abler Advocates than his Pen, it is likely to make a smaller Figure in the Map of *England*, than it has ever done yet. He observes, in the same Paragraph, of what great Consequence *Tiverton* might be to *Ireland*, in taking off some of its Wool, worked into Worsted, provided the Poor could be taught to think justly, and act reasonably; great Pity it is, indeed, that they will not receive the Instructions of such honourable Teachers, and that, like the stupid Adder, they should stop their Ears to the Voice of the Charmer, charm he never so wisely! For it is allowed, says the Letter-Writer



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Writer, even by the Wool-combers themselves, that five Packs of *Irish* Wool, worked into Worsted, might be manufactured weekly in *Tiverton*, without any Detriment to their Labour, and with a great deal of Profit to their Merchants: But say the Wool-combers, "*Should we suffer such a Novelty to be introduced, the Merchants would be Masters, and by Degrees we should have another Norwich rise here.*" I am very glad to hear the Poor, (whose Want of thinking justly, this Gentleman so much laments) can at least talk so rationally: May not only the Poor but the Rich and Great, and every Order of Men, at all Times think as wisely; prudently foresee the direful Consequences, and nobly oppose the first Encroachments of Power, however small and insignificant? For tho' at its Spring it runs in soothing Murmurs, confining itself beneath its Banks, yet having received fresh Rivulets in its Course, it no longer meanders thro' the Plains in soothing Murmurs, but like the horrid Cataracts of the Nile, rushes precipitately down, sweeping away with it Flocks and Herds, and spoiling all the Glory of the Fields: O, that our Patriots may always act like these honest Wool-combers, and not regard the Smiles of the present Hours, but reflect what dark and gloomy Days may come! that Power may as well wrinkle its rugged Brow, as put on flattering Smiles! then will Liberty always flourish like a green Bay tree; Joy and Plenty will run down like Rivers of Oil, and the bitter Wailings of Oppression will never be heard in our Streets. But to return to the Letter-Writer; it seems (as he informs us) that this Objection of the Wool-combers was obviated by the Merchants and Serge-makers, agreeing under their Hands to fix the *Irish* Manufactory to twenty Pieces a Week, and to throw out even those twenty Pieces whenever it should appear to hurt the Wool-comber in his Work. As I cannot but suppose these Gentlemen were honourable

Men,

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Men, I know not how to account for this Obstinacy of the Combers, in refusing these gracious Offers, unless as I imagine, they had heard something of the Story of the Wolf and the Kid; who was secured by her tender Dam in an upper Chamber, out of the Reach of the Wolf, while she went abroad; and charged her not to come down, or open the Door till her Return; but Mr. Wolf coming and knocking at the Door, the Kid peeping out at the Window, Pray, says he, my dear, little, sweet Master Kid, come down and open the Door; for I am a very particular Friend of your Mother and you, and have brought you a delicious Parcel of Shrubs for your Dinner. The poor simple Kid, trusting to his Words, came down, opened the Door, and in so doing, became a Prey to his hungry Jaws. I shall not pretend to determine what Security this Instrument which the Letter Writer speaks of, could have been to the Combers; but it seems, as he has represented it, to be of no manner of Signification at all; for it seems, the twenty Pieces of *Irish* Manufactory were to have been thrown out whenever it should appear to hurt the Wool-comber in his Work, or prejudice the Dutch Trade in general. But who are we to think is allowed by the Instrument to be the Judge of this? Not the suffering Wool comber, I dare say, but the gaining Merchant; and there is certainly such a Thing in Nature as wilful Blindness. And as to their Promise of confining it to twenty Pieces per Week, we know even Kings themselves have sometimes broke their Promises; and to the Eye of Reason it seems mighty improbable that a Body of Merchants should, with a deal of Trouble, and I make no doubt, Expence, establish a Manufactory, and when they have raised its Reputation among their Correspondents, and receive Orders for 40, 50, or 100 Pieces a Week, or perhaps more, that they will content themselves with sending away only 20 — credat Judeus Apella, non ego; neither can I possibly conceive how the

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manufacturing of twenty Pieces of Stuff a Week, in such a flourishing Town as *Tiverton*, can possibly be of so great Consequence as to produce all the glorious Effects the Letter Writer speaks of, viz. "to raise the Splendor of the Town, lessen our Poor, enable the Merchant, (the Glory of Great Britain) to live with Dignity, to answer their Orders, and thereby support the Trade, the Honour, the Interest of the Nation." WONDERFUL EFFECTS, indeed, from manufacturing only 20 Pieces of Stuff a Week! But in my own Judgment, I think it must rather lessen their Reputation than raise it; for how ridiculous and contemptible must they appear to their Correspondents abroad, if they receive such Orders as I have mentioned before, and can only supply a fourth or fifth Part of them? The Letter goes on to inform us, that the Wool-combers refusing this Offer, "the Merchant and Makers resolved not to recede in any one Point from it, wisely judging, that this Strife was for the MASTERY, and that the least Concession more from them would be meanly submitting to a Mob." I hope this Title is conferred upon them by the Letter Writer himself; for surely the Merchants who are supported in their Pomp, their Ease, their Luxury, by the Labour of their Hands, and the Sweat of their Brows, can afford them a more gentle Title: But if they thought them a Mob, on whom they had no Dependence, nor with whom they had no Connexion, why would they enter into any Engagements with them, or make any Proposals to them? For the very doing of this, naturally implies a mutual Dependence and Connexion between them; and as evidently acknowledges, the Combers had a natural Right of rejecting their Proposals, if they did not think them secure and reasonable. What follows is so much in the Language of Oppression, that I think it would do Honour to the Merchants of *Tiverton*, to publicly disown their having any Connexion with the Author of the Letter; for having told us, that the Combers, finding that the

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Merchants and Makers would not make any further Concessions than their first Proposal, determined to remove from thence, and actually did so, leaving their Wives and Children likely to become chargeable to the Parish; he thus goes on—"An Action contrary to the Laws of Nature, of Society, and of revealed Religion, and an Offence which is very justly punishable by an Act of Parliament made in the thirteenth Year of his present Majesty, intitled, the Vagrant Act; for what can excuse that in a Man, that would be deemed unnatural even in a Brute?" Surely, none but some sordid Tool of Oppression, some malicious Soul, some unfeeling Heart of others Woes, could dictate this Paragraph! for the Letter owns, their Wives and Children are not at present left without Subsistence, but only likely to be so: And is it not plain, the absenting Wool-combers are only gone to seek out a more comfortable Subsistence for themselves and Families? And is this an Action contrary to the Laws of Nature, of Society, and revealed Religion, and to be deemed UNNATURAL even in a Brute?

If the Author of this Letter knows any thing of human Nature, he must be sensible the Poor feel the same tender Emotions of Nature about their Families, as the Rich and Great; and I make no doubt, but these poor Combers had many inward Struggles of Tenderness before they could resolve to leave their Homes, their Wives, their little ones: Was not this then Affliction enough, but it must needs be cruelly represented in so black and horrid Colours? But this it seems will not content the Writer of the Letter, and he cannot forbear shaking the Rod of Oppression, and showing the cloven Foot of arbitrary Power; in telling us they are very justly punishable by the Vagrant Act. This Gentleman perhaps, may have the Skill, and think it lawful to interpret any Act according to his own Purpose; but for my own Part, I never thought that Law intended any other than to suppress licentious Employments, and punishing loitering

tering idle Persons, who will apply themselves to no Labour or Employment, to render themselves useful to the State; how therefore Men who, by a long Course of Labour, have been serviceable to their Country, can for only exercising a natural Right, which all Men undoubtedly have, of removing from one Place to another, to better their Condition, be justly punishable by that Act (unless by a Spirit of arbitrary Power, which I hope will never be exercised in this Kingdom) I cannot possibly conceive: But the Scene opens more and more, and every Line tell us plainer and plainer, the grand Point the Writer aims at thro' all his elaborate Performance, *viz.* To bow the Necks of the Poor to the Yoke; and to make them lie down for the Proud to go over them; he therefore falls with great Fury upon that strong Cement, and firmest Pillar of the Poor, those Clubs and Societies which have been instituted amongst them for their mutual Aid and Support; and his proud Heart seems to swell with Indignation that they should dare to debate in these Clubs every Matter of Importance to them; and that every Resolution taken there should be maintained by the several Members of that Club. I know not what the Letter Writer can see so criminal in this; "For have not the Poor Eyes, have they not Hands, have they not Tongues, Organs, Dimensions, Senses, Affections, Passions, as well as the Rich;" And must they make use of none of these for their mutual Defence and Preservation? "Are not the Poor fed with the same Food, hurt with the same Weapons, subject to the same Diseases, healed by the same Means, warm'd and cool'd by the same Summer and Winter as the Rich? If they are prick'd, do they not bleed? If they are hurt, do they not feel? And if they are oppressed, shall they not oppose?" Must they enter into no general Societies for their mutual Aid and Support? Must they in pining Sickness and helpless old Age, depend only upon the cold

cold Charity of their Masters? Shall the Rich be allowed to enter into Combinations and Engagements to oppress the Poor? Shall not they be permitted to make all the Stand their helpless Condition will afford? Alas, alas! miserable, and doubly miserable would be the State of the Poor, if this is to be the Case! Is it not universally known, that the Masters keep back the Wages of the Hireling, and shamefully and cruelly oblige them to take a third Part, at least, in Goods at their own Price, whether they have any Occasion for them or no. But the Author of the Letter tells us, these Clubs, "which were first formed for the Support of its Members in Sickness or old Age, are now become the great Sources of Tumult and Sedition, of Rage and Riots." 'Tis by these our Laws are trampled upon, and our civil Properties invaded; from thence Parties are made that commit all Manner of Outrage, and Schemes are hatch'd that end in Bloodshed and Confusion." That the first Intent of these Clubs, *viz.* to support the Sick and the Aged, is still kept up in a very laudable Manner, is universally known; but as nobody but the Letter Writer has heard of these Schemes of Tumult, Outrage, Bloodshed, and Confusion, if he had not a very wicked Heart, he would not have dared to cast these foul Aspersions upon the Poor and Needy, without supporting them with undoubted Facts, and it would be well, if he had remember'd the Advice of the sacred Preacher; Give not a poor Man Occasion to curse thee: for if he curses thee in the Bitterness of his Soul, his Prayer shall surely be heard of him that made him.

In the Seventh and last Paragraph the Writer concludes with his arbitrary Proposal, which all the foregoing Harangue was only to introduce, *viz.* "That it is with the greatest Humility and most profound Submission, that he refers it to the Consideration of our Nobles and Commons now assembled in Parliament; Whe-

( 22 )

“ Whether the DISSOLUTION of every WOOL-COMBER  
 “ and WEAVER’S-CLUB in this Kingdom would not  
 “ tend greatly to the Advancement of Trade and the Sup-  
 “ pression of Riots in general ? ” AMAZING and UN-  
 HEARD OF PROPOSAL in the Land of Liberty ! for tho’  
 a Conqueror once imposed such a grievous Law upon  
 our Forefathers, yet I believe never before was such  
 a Proposal made to a *British* Parliament, the Guar-  
 dian of Publick Liberty, and I shall expect to see the  
 Author of this Letter call’d before that awful Body to  
 crave Pardon on his Knees for his impious Proposal.  
 From the whole Letter it is evident, that these Clubs  
 are the grand Obstacle to Oppression and Tyranny,  
 which makes the Writer so zealous to have them  
 dissolved, and then I make no doubt, that he would  
 be as zealous that the Poor should not EAT : It there-  
 fore really behoves every good Heart, strenuously to  
 oppose any such Scheme, if it should be attempted,  
 and stand up to plead the Cause of the *Poor* and  
*Needy*.

As the Writer of this Defence hath no Concern  
 with either the Manufacturers or the Masters, and is  
 engaged in it purely out of a Principle of Liberty, he  
 thinks he is obliged, as an *Englishman*, to advise the  
 Manufacturers in general, to enter into still stricter  
 Engagements of BROTHERLY LOVE and MUTUAL  
 ASSISTANCE ; for it is their UNION alone can preserve  
 them. But let them enter into no Riots or Tumults,  
 nor commit any Outrages ; let their Demands be rea-  
 sonable and equitable, so will their Enemies have no  
 Opportunity to triumph over them ; and let them al-  
 ways keep in Mind the Fable of the *Head* and the  
*Members* who quarrelled with one another, and refused  
 each other mutual Assistance till both perished. If the  
 Masters may be advised, let them become the Fathers  
 of the *Poor Manufacturers* ; let them not keep back any  
 of their Hire for Viſtuals, Cloaths, and the like ; but  
 like the good Houſholder in the Gospel, pay every  
 Man

( 23 )

Man his Penny, or what is due to him, before the  
 Sun goes down ; let them assist them in their Sickneſs  
 and not forget them in their old Age ; but remember,  
*the Hireling beſtoweth himſelf* wholly for them ; and  
 one may well venture to ſay ſuch Behaviour will cauſe  
 Trade to flouriſh more, and produce greater Effects,  
 than any arbitrary and oppreſſive Scheme what-  
 ſoever.

P I N I S.





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