

REFLECTIONS
ON
EXTORTION,

SHEWING

THE NATURE, MALIGNITY, AND FATAL TENDENCY OF THAT SIN TO INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES,

DISPLAYED AND ENFORCED IN A

S E R M O N

PREACHED AT

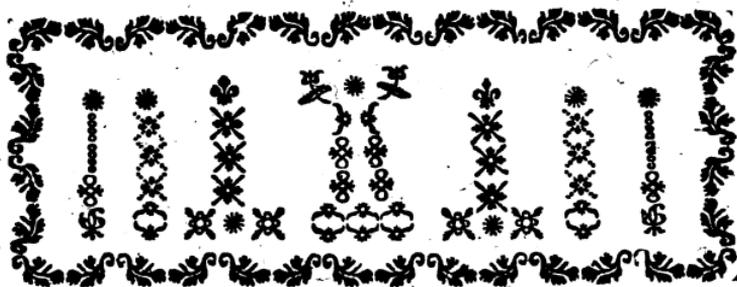
NEW BURY - P O R T,

ON LORD'S DAY FEBRUARY 15TH, 1778.

By ABRAHAM KETELTAS, A. M.

NEW BURY - P O R T:

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EZEKIEL 22. 12.

---And thou hast greedily gained of thy Neighbours by
E X T O R T I O N .

VERY striking and remarkable is the Charge and Exhortation of the great God to the Prophet Isaiah. *Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a Trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.* From this and many other passages of sacred writ, it appears to be the indispensable duty of God's ministers to bear a faithful testimony against all the sins, and especially the crying abominations that prevail amongst the people to whom they are sent. The great Judge of all

the earth, who determines the fate of all its inhabitants, enjoys this important and irksome duty upon the Prophet *Ezekiel* in the beginning of the chapter, of which our text is a part: he commands him to reprove Jerusalem for all her atrocious crimes and transgressions, and to denounce his judgments against them. These are the words of the incensed Jehovah to the Prophet. *Now thou son of man, wilt thou judge, wilt thou judge the bloody City? Yea, thou shalt shew her all her abominations.* What were these abominations? The subsequent verses declare— They were murder, idolatry, disobedience to Parents, oppression of the stranger, the widow, and the orphan—contempt of things sacred, prophanation of the Sabbath, slander to promote the shedding of blood, lewdness, and that of the worst kind; incest and adultery. These were the enormous crimes, for which God vehemently re-proves the Jews, by the mouth of his Prophet—crimes at which an unfeared conscience shudders and recoils—Crimes, for which the flaming wrath of heaven cometh down on the children of disobedience. Yet these crimes all black as they were, and sufficient to plunge a nation into ruin, were but a part of *Jerusalem's* guilt; for sin is prolific, and one vice breeds another. Therefore God subjoins to the dark list of the abovementioned sins, those of bribery, usury, and corruption. In thee says he have they taken gifts to shed blood—thou hast taken usury and increase: And then he upbraids them with **EXTORTION**

in the words of my text, saying, *And thou hast greedily gained of thy neighbours by EXTORTION.*

THIS grievous, crying sin, which God formerly charged on his ancient people, by the mouth of *Ezekiel*, he now charges on the inhabitants of these American States, saying unto them, *Ye have greedily gained of your neighbors, your poor distressed neighbours, by EXTORTION.* As this SIN prevails amongst us with such an high hand, I should be utterly inexcusable before God, and unfaithful to my country, and to the souls of men, if I did not bear my testimony against an evil so destructive and so enormous.

I shall therefore, by divine assistance, endeavor to show you,

- I. THE nature of this sin.
- II. ITS great baseness, and malignity.
- III. ITS fatal and pernicious tendency.

I. THEN I am to shew you the nature of this sin.

THE word EXTORTION, is derived from the latin verb *Extorqueo*, which signifies to force, twist, or wring any thing from another; and it is that sin, whereby a person who has any thing to sell, taking the advantage of his neighbour's necessity, requires more for it than a reasonable price. If you should ask me, what is a reasonable price? I answer, it is such a one as is limited by those

important commandments of loving our neighbor as our selves, and doing to others as we would they should do unto us—such as is consistent with the law of universal benevolence, charity to the poor, compassion to the distressed, and regard to the public interest of our country—Such a price as doth not exceed the former customary profits of honest men, nor the bounds and regulations fixed by our own delegated authority: in one word, such a price as is consistent with the various duties incumbent upon us as christians, as members of society, and as friends to LIBERTY. Every man's conscience, if he impartially consults it, and has due respect to these points, will readily dictate to him what is a reasonable price for his goods; now what exceeds this is EXTORTION, and the greater the excess is, the greater is the EXTORTION.

THIS vice is sometimes in scripture styled oppression, as it is one subject's oppressing another. Thus the Israelites when they bought and sold, were commanded *not to oppress one another, Lev. 25. 14.* But oppression is often distinguished from EXTORTION, as the one is generally a sin of the governors, and the other a sin of the people. Thus the sin of oppression in its appropriated sense, consists in a magistrate's laying heavy and unnecessary taxes, fines, and other impositions upon the people, unjustly seizing their property, and imprisoning their persons—withholding justice from them, rejecting their rea-

sonable petitions, abridging or taking away their lawful privileges, or making unjust war upon them. EXTORTION seems rather limited to the actions of those under authority, and is exercised in those private advantages which men take in their common dealings with one another, and especially in cases of buying and selling. It would be easy to prove and illustrate these definitions of oppression and EXTORTION, & evince their specific difference, from sacred & profane history, but I presume this would be a needless attempt. The crime of EXTORTION is so common amongst us, that however ignorant people of other countries may be of it, the inhabitants of America are so well acquainted by experience, with all its mysteries of iniquity, that what has been already said of its nature, may be deemed amply sufficient.

I now proceed to the second proposition of my discourse, namely. To show its great baseness and malignity.

It flows originally from the grand source of all sin, the universal depravity and corruption of our nature contracted by the fall. It proceeds from that unrighteous, wicked, covetous, malicious, envious, deceitful, unnatural, selfish, unmerciful disposition, which was the consequence of the original apostasy, *Rom. 1. 29.* It proceeds from that sordid avarice, that infamous love of money, which the apostle avers, *is the root of all evil*—from that love of

the world which is enmity against God—from that covetousness which is idolatry—from that mean love of private interest, which would sacrifice the welfare of a whole community for the sake of one's own filthy lucre. Thus we see it is directly opposite to those two great commandments, the love of God and the love of our neighbour, on which hang the whole law and the prophets——It proceeds from littleness of soul, contractedness of mind, baseness and narrowness of heart, low, unmanly, ungenerous, ignoble, and grovelling principles. It is an act of the most flagrant injustice and malevolence against the peace, comfort, and happiness of society, and highly inimical to our country. I observed that covetousness, from which *extortion* springs, is idolatry. What is idolatry? It is bestowing that supreme love on the creature, which is due to the Creator alone. And doth not the *extortioner* love the world and mammon more than God? Doth he not sacrifice his time, talents and affections to those base idols, and for their sakes, live in the continual violation of his Maker's laws?

It is a direct transgression of a positive, divine commandment. *Ye shall not oppress one another, neither shall ye vex nor oppress a stranger,* is the express mandate of the supreme Legislator. Compare *Exod.* 22. 27. with *Lev.* 25. 14. & 17. With this corresponds also, the apostolic exhortation to all christians, *1. Thess.* 4. 2. & 6. *Ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus,*

that no man go beyond, and defraud (or as the word might be rendered OPPRESS) his brother in any matter, for the Lord is the avenger of all such.

IT is directly contrary both to the law and the gospel. It breaks the first and second commandment of the first table, which respects our duty to God, as it idolizes mammon, riches, and the world, and prefers them before the infinitely greatest and best of beings; it transgresses the second, as it pays its adoration, its principal care, love & attention, to a little molten gold & silver, to a few bundles of figured paper, and to the painted trifles of the present scene. It considers and regards them as the supreme good, and as it were, bows down to worship them. It violates the eighth and tenth commandment of the second table, which respects our duty to our neighbour. *Thou shalt not covet any thing that is thy neighbour's* (says the law) but the extortioner, under the influence of that sordid lust, avarice, basely covets other mens property: moreover, he who doth not give his neighbour an equivalent for his money, and exacts from him a greater price for his merchandize than it is worth, not only covets, but virtually, and in the sight of God, steals his neighbour's property. What is stealing? It is the unlawful taking away what is another's—and although there should be no human law to regulate the price of things, and forbid exorbitant profits? yet, they are contrary to the natural laws of justice and equity, written on every man's conscience.

they are contrary to Jehovah's express prohibition, of *extortion* and oppression.

BUT this fordid vice, is not only a manifest transgression of the law; but it is diametrically opposite to the genius, spirit, design, and tendency of the gospel, the example of its amiable and divine author, and his holy apostles—it is directly contrary to the love of mankind, and all those generous virtues enjoined upon christians. It is a flagrant contravention of that excellent and universally approved golden rule of equity, *Whatever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them.* It is a notorious violation of those capital and important commandments of our Savior, on which he laid so great a stress, and an obedience to which he mentions as a peculiar and distinguishing mark of our discipleship and relation to him, I mean the commandments of loving one another, and loving our neighbour as ourselves. It is a direct infringement of the gospel injunction, to do good to all as we have opportunity—to pity the afflicted, sympathize with the suffering, relieve the distressed, assist the widow and fatherless; the stranger and the needy, to promote the honor of religion, the welfare of the church, and our own meetness for the enjoyment of God.

It is contrary to the example of Christ, who being God manifest in the flesh, gave himself for us, and although rich, became poor for our sakes, that we through

his poverty might be made rich. It is contrary to the example of the holy apostles, who spent and were spent for the welfare of mankind, and did not account their lives, their estates, their comforts dear, if so be they might finish their course with joy; and the ministry they had received from the Lord Jesus, to testify for the temporal and eternal benefit of others, the gospel of the grace of God. They suffered stripes, banishment, cruel mockings, confiscation of goods, imprisonment—they wandered about from place to place, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—they exposed themselves to the greatest perils, they underwent the greatest difficulties and fatigues, they undertook the most tedious journeys, and dangerous voyages—and they endured pain, watchings, hunger, thirst, fasting, cold, nakedness—They faced misery and death in a thousand frightful shapes, for the benefit of mankind.

It is a shameful reverse of the example of the primitive christians at Jerusalem, who sold their estates, and distributed the money arising from the sales, to supply the wants of their distressed brethren. All that believed (says the sacred Historian) had all things common, and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. *Acts* 2. 44, 45. It is a crime shamefully disgraced by the virtue of the heathen, who despised money and private interest, when it came in competition with the public good. I could relate many illustrious

instances of their magnanimity, disinterestedness, self-denial, and heroic exploits in their country's cause, to the infinite disgrace of christian *extortioners*; but if I should, this discourse would swell beyond its proper bounds— It is directly contrary to the noble example of many of our brethren, who have abandoned and sacrificed, some their all, some a great part of their worldly goods, for the sake of civil and religious liberty. How many are neglecting their private affairs, and exposing themselves, their lives and fortunes, to the rage of an implacable foe, in the councils of this continent—and how many thousands more have left their houses, occupations, interest, wives, children, parents and dearest connexions, and have voluntarily exposed themselves to the inexpressible hardships of Summer's and Winter's campaigns, and all the horrors of imprisonment, famine, desolation, wounds, slaughter, and death, for the safety and deliverance of their bleeding country. Now what a shameful contrast to all these glorious examples, is the *extortioner*, who endeavors to fatten by the fall, thrive by the ruin, and enrich himself by the impoverishment of his brethren—who sacrifices religion, liberty, his country—the blood of the faithful soldier the councils of the worthy patriot, the happiness of millions now alive, and the happiness of millions yet unborn, to his sordid passion for private gain. What a pest of society! What a sordid wretch! What an infamous, what a despicable character is such a man! Altho' he is a being destined for eternity, he is entirely occupied

with the most contemptible trifles of time. His immortal soul, capable of angelic and celestial delights, and of aspiring to a likeness and enjoyment of the DEITY, flutters in the dirt, wallows in the mire, contracts itself up into the basest and meanest selfishness as the snail draws itself up into its shell, and is only active to obtain enjoyments common with the brutes—he envies the happiness of his neighbors, he labors hard for their destruction—he in fact regards not the tears of the widow and fatherless, the groans of the poor and distressed, and the miseries of the friends of mankind. If good offices and charity to such objects are the fruits of benevolence; then surely grinding the faces of the poor, extorting from unhappy sufferers their small pittance, by exorbitant prices for the necessaries of life, must be the effects of a hard, cruel, malevolent, unfeeling heart, destitute of humanity and compassion. *Extortion* is a crime so sordid and odious, that even the Pharisee thanked God, and congratulated himself, that he was not guilty of it; and the apostle Paul ranks it with the most atrocious sins, such as drunkenness, theft, and sodomy. Nay, he warns christians not even to eat with, or to hold the least communication with them; but to avoid them as a plague, as a nuisance, as an abomination, as odious criminals, whose persons are contemptible, and whose company is a disgrace. See 1. Cor. 5 11. *But now (says he) I have written to you, not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an*

EXTORTIONER ; *with such an one, no not to eat.* Thus you see the inexpressible baseness and malignity of the vice in question.

I now proceed to the last point proposed, namely, to shew the fatal and pernicious tendency of *extortion*,

1st. It tends to debase the soul, and render it averse to religion, devotion, and communion with God. The holy apostle declares, that the friendship of this world is enmity against God. If any man (says he) will be the friend of the world, the same is the enemy of God. If any man love the world, the love of the father is not in him. Thus *extortion*, which is both an effect and an encouragement of this ignoble passion, leads us away from the only fountain of bliss, to those sordid pursuits, occupations, and enjoyments in which it cannot be found. It frequently impels the avaricious mind to the commission of the most atrocious crimes of which human nature can possibly be guilty. The love of money (according to the unerring voice of inspiration) is the root of all evil, which some having coveted after, have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. Balaam was induced to advise the ruin of Israel, Judas to betray his innocent Lord and Master, and many others to betray their friends and sell their country for money. Some have wished their relations dead, and others have actually embred their hands in their blood, for the love

of filthy lucre. Numbers have been inveigled by this infamous passion, to commit theft, forgery, perjury, and other criminal actions, which have brought them to the gallows.

It throws insurmountable obstacles in the way to heaven; renders us averse to, and unfit for its enjoyments, and damps every generous purpose for the welfare of others. Our blessed Lord declares, *that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven*: We accordingly read that the young man in the gospel, went away sorrowful from Christ, because he had *great possessions*. What keeps so many rich, so many mighty, so many noble, from embracing the gospel? Is it not their attachment to the unrighteous mammon? What is the reason of all that meanness discovered by many pretended friends of liberty, in equivocating, lying, swearing falsely, refusing to assist their country in the cabinet or the field? What is the reason of their lukewarmness, inactivity, changing of sides, and finally abandoning the glorious cause of American liberty? Is it not the basest self-interest, and the sordid love of money? He who is resolved to be rich, at all adventures, and on no account to sacrifice private interest or part with his purse, must needs be guilty of many base and mean actions, and will infallibly fall into a snare, and many hurtful lusts which drown men into perdition. It has been partly observed before, that

extortion proceeds from injustice, cruelty, hardness of heart—it also keeps alive, encourages, and nourishes those odious dispositions—it insensibly divests the soul of pity, humanity, integrity, benevolence, and every generous feeling and sentiment—It degrades human nature, and brutalizes every divine faculty; estranges the mind from God and religion, unfits it for holy prayers and meditations, destroys faith, quenches the love of God and man, damps the noblest purposes for the public good, and leads to the most shameful and inglorious conduct. What is the cause of this unnatural, bloody civil war, and all the disasters of our suffering country? Is it not the accursed love of money, and a desire of enriching the needless and pestilent members of society with the spoils of others? This has produced all the unjust decrees and measures against America, and stain'd its once delightful fields with brothers blood. This has cast a dark cloud over our prosperity, and filled the land with mourning, lamentation, and woe.

2ly. EXTORTION and Oppression tend to draw down the anger and curse of God, temporal judgments and calamities on the heads of those by whom they are committed. See the following awful threatnings against them. *Amos 4 12. Hear this word ye kine of Bashan, that are in the mount of Samaria, which oppress the poor, which crush the needy, which say to their masters, bring and let us drink. The Lord hath sworn by his holiness, that lo, the*

days shall come upon you, that he will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fish-hooks. Here the Lord addresses them by the name of beasts, shewing thereby his infinite contempt of such characters—He declares that he will come near to judgment, and will be a swift witness against oppressors, against those who oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right; compare *Zeph.* 3. 1, with *Mal.* 3. 5. The Prophet Zechariah saw a flying roll, which was the curse of God, that went forth over the face of the whole Earth; and it was to enter into the house of the thief (which every Extortioner is) to confound and destroy him. The Lord Jesus Christ is represented in the 72d. Psalm, as that righteous king, who should judge, that is, plead and espouse the cause of the poor, save the children of the needy, and break in pieces the oppressor. This is the awful mandate of Jehovah to the Prophet. *Amos* 3. 9, 10 & 11 verses, publish in the Palaces at Ashdod, and in the Palaces in the land of Egypt, and say assemble yourselves upon the mountains of Samaria: and behold the great tumults in the midst thereof: and the oppressed in the midst thereof. For they know not to do right, saith the Lord—who store up violence and robbery in their Palaces. Therefore thus saith the Lord God; an adversary there shall be, even round about the land; and he shall bring down thy strength from thee, and thy Palaces shall be spoiled.” Holy Job describes in a very particular man-

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ner, the character, wickedness, and punishment of the oppressor. *Job*, 27. 8, and following verses. *For what (says he) is the hope of the hypocrite (for by the way, all extorters who pretend to be God's children are gross hypocrites) what is his hope, though he hath gained when God taketh away his soul? will God hear his cry when trouble cometh upon him? Will he delight himself in the Almighty? will he call upon God always? I will teach you by the hand of God, that which is with the Almighty will I not conceal. Behold all ye yourselves have seen it: why then are ye thus altogether vain? This is the portion of a wicked man with God, and the heritage of oppressors, which they shall receive from the Almighty. If his children be multiplied, it shall be for the sword: and his offspring shall not be satisfied with bread. Those that remain of him shall be buried in death; and his widow shall not weep. Though he heap up silver as the dust, and prepare raiment as the clay; he may prepare it, but the just shall put it on, and the innocent shall divide the silver. He buildeth his house as a moth, and as a booth that the keeper maketh. The rich man shall lie down, but he shall not be gathered; he openeth his eyes, and is not. Terrors take hold on him as waters, a tempest stealeth him away in the night. The east wind carrieth him away, and he departeth; and as a storm hureth him out of his place. For God shall cast upon him, and not spare: he would fain flee out of his hand. Men shall clap their hands at him, and shall hiss him out of his place. The sacred Scriptures pronounce a woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to*

his house, and declare that *he who oppresseth the poor to increase his wealth, shall surely come to want.* From these passages of sacred writ, we see the vengeance of God against *extortion*, and that ill-gotten wealth is a curse to its owners and their posterity. There are many examples of this in sacred and profane History—I will mention a few out of Scripture. Achan, and not only his sons and his daughters, but his oxen, his asses, his sheep, his tent, and all that he had, were destroyed and burnt, because he had acquired gold, silver, and a Babylonish garment by sinful and unlawful means. *Josh. 7.* The treasures which Solomon raised by oppression and heavy taxes, were soon taken away from his son Rehoboam, by Shishak King of Egypt. *2. Chron. 12. 9.* Ahab and Jezabel unjustly deprived Naboth of his vineyard, for which God's curse came on them and their children—dogs licked the blood of the cruel monarch, in the very vineyard that he had unrighteously seized—his impious queen who had advised him to it, was thrown headlong out of a window upon the pavement, and was eaten up by dogs, and their posterity were cut off by an untimely death. And, very lately (if the public prints are true) a man who had sold a load of wood at an exorbitant price in *Salem*, returning home and meeting another load intended for that place, tried to purchase it, in order to make an unreasonable profit upon it, and fell down dead.

3dly. **EXTORTION** if not repented of and forsaken, will issue in our eternal ruin. It is ranked by the inspired writers with the worst of crimes, threatened with exclusion from heaven, and everlasting damnation. Know ye not (says the apostle) that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor the lascivious, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor **EXTORTIONERS**, shall inherit the kingdom of God. 1. Cor. 6. 9. The Lord declares by the mouth of Ezekiel, that, *If a man beget a son that is a robber, that hath defiled his neighbor's wife, hath oppressed the poor and the needy, hath spoiled by violence, hath not restored the pledge, and hath lift up his eyes to the idols, hath committed abomination, hath given forth upon usury, and hath taken increase, he shall not live, he hath done all these abominations, he shall surely die, his blood shall be upon his own head.* Ezek. 18. 10, &c. Heaven is inhabited by those who lov'd God above the world, preferred the testimony of a good conscience, before thousands of gold and silver—who sought first the kingdom of God and his righteousness—who preferred spiritual and eternal joys, before the richest possessions of this world—who lov'd their neighbor as themselves, exercised kindness to all as they had opportunity, and did to others as they would that others should do unto them—who lov'd their country and the church, more than their own lives and estates—whose bowels were moved with compassion for the poor, who

pitied the suffering, sympathized with the afflicted, endeavored to promote the welfare of mankind, relieved the widow, assisted the fatherless, fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, took the stranger into their houses, clothed the naked, visited and assisted the sick and the prisoners. These are the happy souls who dwell with God in Zion. But an *extortioner* and an oppressor is a character the very reverse of all these. He cannot therefore without repentance and reformation, inherit the kingdom of God. If such an one was admitted into heaven, he would find no suitable company, occupation or entertainment there; he would find no one there with whom he could converse concerning schemes to amass wealth—he would find none from whom he could greedily gain by *extortion*; there is no trade nor merchandize, no buying nor selling in that blessed world; there he could not engross, forestall, and pursue that lucrative business which was his chief delight and concern upon earth: Heaven would be a disagreeable place to him, and therefore he would be excluded from it as utterly unworthy of, and unfit for its spiritual, holy, and glorious enjoyments—there would be great danger, should he be permitted to reside in the celestial city, that he would rob it of its pure gold and precious stones.

THUS *extortion* debases the soul, renders it averse to God and religion, pulls down the vengeance of the Almighty upon it in this life, and exposes it to eternal damnation in the life to come. These are the melancholly

and destructive effects of avarice and *extortion* at all times, but in the present circumstances of our country, its prevalence is uncommonly pernicious. I will now therefore, endeavor to show you the peculiar evil tendency of this vice at the present time, when the continent is filled with a desolating civil war,

1. It tends to disunite the States of America, and dissolve that band of union on which their safety and existence as a free people depend. One of our generals with a sight of whose letter I was indulged, declares in it, that externally, or with regard to the British army and their allies, our affairs never wore a better aspect than they do now; but internally, or considering our indolence, pursuit of self-interest, divisions, and especially our excessive and universal *extortion*, they never looked worse: He also thought the providence of God was remarkably against us at the battle of Germantown, when our troops surprisingly retreated in the midst of victory: It was also his opinion, that although our cause would finally prevail, this desirable and long wished for event, would not take place, 'till after New-England had been more severely punished for her sins and ingratitude. I am also told, that the illustrious General of the enemy, a gentleman of great genius and discernment, now a spectator of our excesses, has declared, "we shall soon destroy ourselves without the interposition of foreign troops"—let us take the hint before it is too late. *FAS EST AB HOSTE DUCERE.*

How distressing is the situation of the Continent rendered by our iniquity ! Many respectable families who preferred religion, liberty, and the welfare of their country, to their private interest, forsook their estates, their houses, lands, and means of subsistence, with a small pittance, to seek an asylum, a place of refuge among their brethren in the uninvaded States ; and those brethren from whom they have a right to expect all the compassion, charity, and kind offices of christian benevolence ; instead of helping, pitying, and supporting them under their misfortunes, are picking their pockets, obliging them to sell the remains of their broken fortunes to keep themselves from starving, and taking from them their scanty pittance, by exorbitant prices for the necessaries of life. Those refugees, who are thus squeezed and oppressed by their brethren, will naturally be filled with indignation against them, and must think that those persons have no right to complain of the oppression of Great-Britain, nay cannot seriously oppose it, who oppress one another. This inhumanity and oppression, has driven many friends of liberty to throw themselves upon the mercy of the enemy, who, not long before, had bravely fought against them. Many left their possessions in New-York and Long-Island, but meeting with little kindness and hospitality, and being likely to want both food and cloathing in New-England, they, in the midst of their distress, and in the bitterness of their soul, returned to their habitations, thinking that the oppression of the enemy was less distressing, than that

of their unnatural brethren. The New-England States have the only ports that are free for the trade and navigation of the friends of liberty—New-York, New-Jersey, and Pennsylvania, are by the enemy excluded from them. If they would fetch from hence the foreign merchandize they so greatly need, they cannot come, but at an enormous expence, and when they are here, they can purchase but little, the price of things being exorbitant and unparalleled. No one can tell, except those who have been eye witnesses of it, how great are the sufferings of our brethren in the middle colonies, and how grievous and distressing our *extortion* is to them : It naturally tends to enkindle hatred, and the most implacable animosity—It tends to divide our councils, weaken our efforts in the field, and set us together by the ears—This *extortion* is the more odious and unnatural, as the southern States had so much compassion with New-England in her distress, and sent so many valuable presents for the relief of her poor ; and now the seat of war being removed to such a distance from us, numbers of this country seem to be so far from sympathizing with their suffering brethren, that they endeavor to profit by their misfortunes. Instead of keeping our men at home, that we may compleat our quotas of the continental army—strengthen the hands of our brave, prudent, and worthy General, and enable him to make one great effort for the relief and deliverance of our distressed brethren, we are employing our soldiers on the watry element for our personal advantage ; although

the chance is four to one that they will fall into the enemies hands and suffer death, or a cruel treatment worse than death. We are striving who shall best improve his private interest, and make the most money, although it be to the endangering, and perhaps the destruction of our country and our invaluable liberties.

THESE never was, I think, a better opportunity than now presents itself, to put an end to the present ruinous war; and perhaps this let slip and neglected, another may never come. But instead of seizing the opportunity, many seem to consider this war as a commercial one, where their primary design is to manage it so as to promote their own filthy lucre. O sordid love of gain! to what a mean and pernicious conduct dost thou not impel ignoble and growling minds. O detestable avarice! to procure gold at the expence of our neighbour's blood and happiness. "Is there not some chosen curse, some hidden thunder in the stores of heaven, red with uncommon wrath, to blast the man who owes his greatness to his country's ruin."

2. THIS oppression and *extortion*, have greatly depreciated, and tend to depreciate the continental currency, and thus ruin the grand American cause. What mortal enemies to their country were the first *extortioners*? and how criminally deficient were those who had it in their power to restrain them, and enforce the laws for regula-

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tion, and did not? First the merchants began the example, and then the farmers took it up, to be even with them, 'till at last it has got footing amongst labourers, manufacturers, and tradesmen. Many things are now sold for five or six times the price they used to be; and the consequence is, that the continent is burthened with an expence for cloathing, provisions, cartage, soldiers wages, and other necessaries, perhaps five times as much as at the beginning of the war; so that the continental debt accumulates at an enormous rate. We are obliged to pay as much for one campaign now, as ought to have served for four or five. As money is the sinews of war, in proportion as that is depreciated, the means and power of defence are weakened; and our country is exposed to ruin, slaughter, and devastation. The success of our cause depends upon the credit of the Congress, and the bills they have emitted: but if the credit of those bills is lost, how can the cause be supported.

3. THIS oppression and *extortion* has a tendency to ruin diminish and discourage the army, upon whom, under God, the safety and defence of our country depends. Is it not extremely unreasonable, cruel, and unjust, that a number of brave men who love their country more than their own lives, families, and private interests, should, by infernal *extortion*, have their wages reduced to nothing, and be deprived of the necessaries of life. These unhappy men expose themselves to Summer's heat and Winter's

cold—to frost, rain, and snow; to dews, damps, and piercing winds—they are exposed to continual watchings, dangers, and alarms—to fluxes, fevers, dropfies, agues, pleurifies, consumptions, and other distempers—their constitutions are broken by continual hardships—they leave their peaceful habitations, their dear parents, their wives and children, and march through the most tedious roads, sleep in miserable tents or huts, and are often exposed to the chilling, piercing, freezing, wintry air without any covering—they are cloathed with rags, and often infested with filthy vermin. Farmers shut their doors upon them, will afford them no entertainment, and will give them nothing, or but a trifle for their money—Without shoes they march on the snow and ice barefooted, and mark their way with blood. Sometimes they are taken prisoners by the enemy, are cruelly kicked, beaten, and insulted—sometimes are stabbed with bayonets, or hack'd in pieces with broad-swords and cutlasses—Sometimes they are put in nauseous suffocating dungeons, prisons, guardships, full of stench and disease, where they contract mortal distempers, linger away a miserable existence, and are starved to death; sometimes they are broken under arms; have a hand or a leg lopped off, are frightfully maimed, or receive a mortal, excruciating wound, which makes them rend the heaven with their cries. No tongue can paint; no imagination can conceive, what agonies, what tortures, what anguish they suffer---their families are starving at home, whilst they are dying by

inches in camps and fields of battle. All this they do and suffer for their country; and yet, O barbarous and unfeeling ingratitude! their country is insensible of their services and sufferings—and all their recompence is a little ragged paper money, which their brethren are striving to render of no value. The hard hearted *extortioner* has no compassion or sympathy with these poor devoted bleeding victims, but is striving to grow rich by their blood, wounds, miseries, and slaughter—by the ruin of these brave men and their families—How hard, how cruel is this! Who would wonder if they should execrate the authors of their unparalleled sufferings, quit the army, and never more fight for their ungrateful country, Who can wonder if any more troops should refuse to enlist, when they consider what discouragements, *extortion* has thrown in their way. What generous soldier's breast would not be fir'd with indignation, to think that whilst he is ruining health, life, and family, and undergoing all the hardships of a military life for his country—the *extortioner* should be only intent upon his gain and his ease, and do nothing for his comfort, or the welfare of his family, but every thing to ruin them.

4. OPPRESSION and *extortion* naturally tend most to the ruin of those who seem least to deserve it; and whose sufferings are a great sin and reproach to their country: I mean the widows and fatherless, ministers of the gospel—Schoolmasters, the poor, the aged, the infirm—those

who are retired from worldly business on account of a religious, contemplative life, or for the public good. It has been observed that the ministers of the gospel have been true and fast friends to the freedom of America; have exerted their influence and abilities, to rouse their countrymen to a sense of their danger—have watched over their liberties, and endeavored to animate them bravely to oppose tyranny and oppression. Now by the prevalence of Extortion, their salaries, as well as those of the instructors of youth are reduced to but a fourth or fifth part of their value. The widows and fatherless, of whose interests every community, and every christian should be peculiarly tender, are exceedingly injured by the depreciation of the Continental currency—their incomes being lessened as much as the abovementioned salaries—Many men of worth and probity who living on their means, devote their time and talents to the service of their country, are spending their fortunes, whilst the most worthless members of society, and persons of the least merit, conscience, honor, integrity, and love to their country are increasing theirs. But I hope that times so pernicious to the best, and so profitable to the worst of men, will not long continue. Extortion in a special manner (says one) “is very unmerciful and distressing to the poor, their circumstances call for our pity and compassion. But what doth the extortioner? Instead of affording relief, he adds to their miseries and wants. Yea further, is not Extortion in a great measure the cause of

their misery? Doth it not bring the distressing calamity of pinching want upon thousands, who otherwise might have been strangers to such deep affliction forever! What a shocking reflection doth this afford! What complacency can the Extortioner take in his unjust gain, while many from whom he has extorted it and who are intitled to his mercy and compassion, may be now groaning and dying for want? at least it is not owing to his benevolence if they are not."

5. Oppression and Extortion naturally tend to the ruin of those very persons that practice them, I have shewn their obvious tendency to ruin the army and the country, and in their ruin Extortioners will be involved as much, if not more than others. I have also shewn that ill-gotten wealth is a curse to its possessors and their posterity. If the enemy should prevail, what will all their bundles of Continental Bills avail? they will be probably of little more worth than so much waste paper. By his sordid and exorbitant profits, the Extortioner is making a sword to pierce his own bowels, and he is pulling down the pillars that support the goodly fabric of liberty and property, which will fall upon his head and crush him with its ruins. Extortioners may think they are safe, because the seat of war is at a distance; but if the Southern States are subdued, it is to be feared these Northern Colonies will share the same fate, and if they are conquered, their sufferings probably will be greater

than others, as they have most vigorously opposed the common oppressors—therefore it is much better for them to fight the enemy where they are, than to have to contend with them at home—the most prudent step is to make one great effort now, before the enemy make any farther conquests; for I imagine the more places they have in their possession, humanly speaking, there is the greater probability of our destruction and their success. If, instead of trying to gain by Extortion, General Washington had been properly supported, it is probable the enemy would not have been now in Philadelphia. How painful is the consideration, that a brave people, so zealous for Liberty, so prodigal of their blood in it's cause, should now endanger it by that mean, scandalous, mercenary, sordid vice; the vile nature, baseness, and tendency of which I have been endeavouring to set before you. How distressing the idea, that a people, who were the foremost for the public good, should now be ready to sacrifice it for the basest self-interest, and to a sordid desire of filthy Lucre! What will Europe think of it? What will the rest of the States say of it? Will they not be ready to suppose that all the boasts of patriotism and public virtue in this country were false, and that the most detestable views of private advantage lay concealed under all those fair and specious appearances? What will posterity think of you? Your renowned ancestors left Great-Britain and all their interest in it, brav'd the fury of the Atlantic, came to this once barren and howling wilderness and ex-

posed themselves to Savage cruelty for the sake of Liberty, and yet their posterity sacrifice that invaluable Jewel, for a little pelf, for a little white or yellow dirt, for a few bundles of paper money.

ARE not such degenerate men like the mercenary prophet Balaam, cursing their country for the wages of unrighteousness? For by what better name can I call the profits of *extortioners* than the wages of unrighteousness? Are they not obtained in direct opposition to the advice of Congress, whom we all pretend (and before ought above all men) to reverence and respect; to the laws of our own representatives, whom (if we desire the public good) we never were under stronger obligations to obey? Thus we teach the enemy to despise those honorable and respectable assemblies, to whom we owe uncommon love, esteem, and gratitude—who for our sakes have stood in the gap and exposed themselves to the hottest rage of a cruel, bloody, and vindictive ministry—who have exposed their persons, lives, families, and estates, to the utmost malice of tyranny and oppression. If the States of New-England had complied with the Regulations of their Representatives, this *extortion* and oppression had never been. What an infamous blot, never to be effaced will it leave upon their characters—if after having already performed the most difficult part in defence of the liberty and happiness of this vast continent, they should now suffer it to be subdued, through a sordid attachment to private gain

and self-interest? Would not posterity, and generations yet unborn, rise up and curse the authors of their servitude and misery. Alas! Alas! that the liberties of America should be trifled with and lost, for the profits of *extortion*. I hope no one will be offended at what I say —my heart is averse to displease and publish disagreeable things to my brethren, and especially to those whose kindness I have largely experienced. But I would prefer fidelity to Christ, and the good of my country, before my own private advantage. And I think I have a right to speak freely, as I have left by far the principal part of my fortune, and a state of affluence, for the love of religion, liberty, and my country, and thereby reduced myself and a numerous family to want and indigence. But if refugees leave all for liberty and their country, is it not shameful that those who possess all unhurt, should not be content with a moderate profit, especially after a plentiful harvest, and considerable success at sea; so that they have in a manner, the most of the trade and merchandise of half America in their hands? —Is not avarice in such circumstances, unspeakably base and detestable? What would an ancient Roman say to those *extortioners*, who pretend to be patriots? would he not blush at their gross effrontery? would he not think that the christian religion had debased, instead of ennobling the human mind? However this vice is not countenanced, but greatly condemned by the Christian religion.

It was a maxim' with the Romans *Condonare inimicitias reipublicæ*—to sacrifice their private resentment and private interest to the welfare of the common wealth. History affords illustrious instances of their zeal and magnanimity, their noble disinterestedness and great self-denial in their country's cause—Shall Pagan zeal and patriotism excel Christian? —O my brethren, suffer it not to be said, to the disgrace of our most holy religion: Detest, abandon a vice so contrary to its dictates, and which sinks you so much beneath the Heathen. You have noble examples of disinterested love in your Bibles to animate you to a generous conduct with respect to your country. The blessed Jesus, to whom you are indebted for life, and breath, and all things, for all the enjoyments of this life, and the blessed hope of a more glorious inheritance in the life to come—this glorious, this divine Saviour, deny'd himself, and laid down his life for you, and therefore you should be willing to lay down your lives, and part with your substance for the brethren, *Although he was rich, rich in all the glories of the divine nature, and rich in all the happiness of the heavenly world, yet he made himself poor for your sakes, that ye through his poverty might be rich.* All the holy Apostles did spend and were spent for the church and people of God, and did not count their lives dear, if they could thereby promote the happiness of Men. If they were offered up a sacrifice for the dear christian brethren, they joy'd and rejoiced with them. All your pi-

ous ancestors forsook England, that land of opulence and delight, and came to this once howling wilderness out of love to the church of Christ, and civil and religious liberty—O let these illustrious examples enkindle in your breasts a spirit of noble emulation—pity your bleeding, suffering, desolated country—sympathise with the distressed mourning spouse of Christ—compassionate your persecuted, spoiled, oppressed brethren, wandering about with numerous families, and in want of the necessaries of life, see many who once were seated in the soft lap of affluence, now put to the greatest shifts to provide sustenance for themselves and little ones—see the houses of your brethren crackling in the flames, the labor of their hands and their paternal inheritance in the possession of aliens—Behold your best friends buffeted, insulted, imprisoned, starved to death, and treated as the off-scouring of the earth, by the inhuman and unrelenting foe. Behold many noble, magnificent, and stately churches in New-York, Philadelphia, New-Jersey, and other places, where once the great Father of the universe was worshiped in spirit and truth—where the adoring multitude served God in the beauty of holiness—where a crucify'd Saviour was preached, and the whole counsel of God faithfully declared—See these holy temples either shut up, or shamefully prophaned, turned into hospitals, stables, riding schools and theatres, defiled with filth and obscenity. See schools and nurseries of learning, where youth were train-

ed up to be useful in church and state, abandoned, and broken to pieces—behold both tutors and scholars, driven from those once peaceful seats of wisdom, erudition and piety, where they lived on Angels food. See religion and learning interdicted; trade, commerce and husbandry interrupted, and many parts of this pleasant land turned into fields of blood—hear the groans of starving expiring prisoners—see the wounds of brave soldiers, behold their pale, languid countenances, and then judge ye whether this be a time greedily to gain by *Extortion*, and to sacrifice the welfare of your bleeding country to your own private interest. Rather be persuaded that nothing can be a greater injury to the glorious cause you have espoused, or more provoke God to depart from us and pour out the vials of his wrath upon you and the land of your nativity. Consider how oppression destroyed Israel and Judah, and fear least a similar cause produce a similar effect in America. Consider what an absurd ! what a preposterous thing it is to complain of the oppression of the enemy, whilst you are so grievously oppressing one another. Reflect upon the vileness, malignity and atrocious nature of *Extortion*, its direct contrariety to the express commands of your great Lord and master, and the plain dictates of his holy gospel, the curses God has denounced against it—its destructive consequences to its perpetrators here, and the eternal damnation with which it will be punished hereafter—its fatal tendency to break the union

of these States ; weaken and dissolve the army ; destroy the Continental Bills of credit ; ruin the worthiest and most helpless inhabitants of the land ; ministers and poor ; widows and fatherless ; and finally ruin the religion and liberty of America, in which you must be involved ; consider that this *Extortion* is a stupid vice, which, while it ruins many worthy members of society, can be of little actual benefit to the *Extortioner* himself. For one man's *Extortion*, provoking another's, and so extending to the community till the whole lump is leavened, the *Extortioner* is then, upon the whole, little or no better for his *Extortion*, and must be haunted with the stinging reflection, that he is ruining his country out of pure avarice and baseness of spirit. Consider all these things, and abandon, detest a crime so enormous, and pregnant with such fatal consequences, and let it no more be once named amongst you : think it not less a sin because it is so common, but rather account this an aggravation of its malignity. Associate for the extirpation of this crying evil, do all you can to prevent it. No doubt if people were in general willing to put a stop to this vice, remedies might easily be provided against it : let us comply with the dictates of God's word, the advice of the honorable Congress, and the regulations of our rulers, and an end may be put to the growing evil—If this is not done, I fear our cause and country will be ruined ; and then all that we have been labouring for, at the expence of so

much blood and treasure is lost, and it would have been better if we had never opposed the measures of oppression. Rouse then, my dear brethren, consider the fatal consequences of your conduct, and for God's sake, for Christ's sake, for the churches sake, for your souls sake, for the sake of your bleeding country, and all that is valuable in life, to a generous mind, abandon that fatal conduct e'er it be too late, and instead of greedily gaining by *Extortion*, try who shall do most to raise and encourage the army, relieve our distressed brethren in the neighbouring States, and send such reinforcements to our wise, great, magnanimous, worthy, brave and prudent General, as may enable him, with the smiles of Providence, to drive out the Enemy, and deliver his country—which may God of his infinite mercy grant for Christ's sake.

AMEN and AMEN,

N. B. *Since the foregoing Discourse was Delivered, some small additions have been made.*

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