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LIBERTY DEFINED.

[From the 2d vol. of Elements of Moral Science, by Dr. Beattie.]

DOES liberty, consist in the power, of doing what we please? No: for if every body had this power, there could be no liberty at all; because our life and property would be at the disposal of every man who was able and willing to take them from us. In a free country, every violation of law is an attack upon the public liberty. The laws of God and our country are our best and only security against oppression; and therefore liberty can exist among us no longer than while those laws are obeyed. Milton, who loved liberty as much, I believe, as ever any man did, has truly observed, when speaking of it, that, "who loves that must first be wise and good." See his twelfth sonnet.

Does Liberty consist in our being governed by laws of our own making? I know not how many political writers have laid this down as a first principle, and a self-evident maxim: and yet, if Britain be a free government, this maxim is grossly absurd. Who are they who can be said to be governed by laws of their own making? I know of no such persons; I never heard or read of any such; except, perhaps, among pirates and other banditti, who, trampling on all laws divine and human, refused to be governed in any other way than by their own licentious regulations. The greatest part of the laws by which we are governed were made long ago: I should be glad to know how a man co-operates in making a law before he is born. But are we not instrumental in making those laws, which are made in our own time? Granting that we are, which is by no means the case, these are not the only laws by which we are governed: we must obey the common law of the land, which is of immemorial standing, as well as the statutes made in the last session of parliament. The British laws are enacted by the King, Lords, and Commons, who may amount in all to about eight hundred persons: the inhabitants of Great-Britain, who must obey these laws, are computed at eight millions. In Britain, therefore, not to mention the rest of the empire, are more than seven millions of persons who are governed by laws which they neither make, nor can alter: and even the King,