

Letter by Theophilus Lillie, Jan. 9 1770, Boston, *Boston Chronicle*, Jan. 15, 1770, vol. III, issue 3.

BOSTON

In consequence of a Vote passed last Merchants Meeting, in which the names of Messrs. Benjamin Greene and Son, John Taylor, and Theophilus Lillie, are mentioned : The following was published in the Mass. Gaz. of January 11.-- Messrs. Green and Son and Mr. Taylor, have also published vindications of their conduct.

Every man had a natural right to vindicate his Character in a publick manner, when a publick attack is made upon it. My character has been attacked in the publick News-Papers, and a present I can take no other method of redress but by endeavoring to clear it up in the same day.

When the Subscriptions for non-importation were carrying about, they were repeatedly brought to me, and as often as they were brought I refused signing. I knew many worth Gentlemen had refused, and I was told there was no compulsion, I therefore went on sending for my goods as usual, for the support of my family depended upon it. The 4th day of August last Mr. W. Whitwell, Mr. T. Boylston and Mr. B. Austin came to me as a Committee from the Merchants, and desired I would sign their agreement; I declined it : They told me Mr. Fletcher and Mr. Taylor, altho' they refused to sign the general agreement, had signed a certain paper, which Mr. Whitwell would bring me, or I might see it at Mr. Taylor's Shop – These Gentlemen treated me very civilly. In the afternoon I went to Mr. Taylor's shop, where I found Mr. Whitwell and Mr. Austin, together with Mr. Cushing the Chairman of the Merchants Committee : They then produced a paper, the copy of which follows.

Boston, August 4. 1769. Whereas we the Subscribers have not heretofore entered into Agreement of the Merchants for non-importation, we do now promise, that we will not send for any goods to any part of Great-Britain until January next, directly nor indirectly ; and if any goods shall come consigned us, we will deliver them up to the Committee of Merchants.

As Witness our Hands.

I found there was a great clamour among the people, and against my inclination, for I chose to come into no agreement whatsoever, I was persuaded to sign it : I understood it to be drawn up by these gentlemen for me to sign. They were content, and I expected to hear no more of it. The same afternoon there was a meeting of the merchants at Fanueil-Hall, where, as I have been informed by some who were present, the paper I had signed was read and seemed at first to give general satisfaction ; but one of the committee of

merchants spoke against the acceptance of it, and was seconded by another, and it was soon voted not satisfactory : and Mr. Boylstone, who spoke and voted for accepting of it, was treated in such a manner as I dare say he thought he did not deserve. Surely upon their refusing to accept what I had done, my promise ceased to be obligatory, if it could have been so considered before. I returned home in the evening, and was informed I had been sent for by the merchants; I went out again immediately. and met Mr. Fletcher and Mr. Taylor coming from the meeting, who informed me what had passed there, and advised me not to go, unless I was contented to do every thing I was bid to do. I took their advice and went home. The 7th of August Mr, Whitwell and Mr. Austin came to me to require my attendance at 4 o'clock, at the merchants meeting ; I told them I did not like the treatment of Mr. Fletcher and Mr. Taylor had received ; and I thought I had done enough in signing their paper: They disapproved of Mr. Fletcher and Mr. Taylor's treatment, and approved of the paper I had signed; but they said the committee were very high, and they dreaded the consequences of my refusal. I could not however be convinced that they had any right to require my attendance, and I refused to go. The merchants met, and voted, that my name, with others, should be published in the news-papers and in hand-bills, as enemies to our country, &c. which was done accordingly ; and it was reported that Mr. W. Dennie one of the committee spread the Hand-bills immediately through many of the country towns ; and the greatest pains were taken to stop my customers from coming to my shop, my sign board was defaced, and my name brushed out, and I suffered many other indignities. The second of October I understood there was to be another meeting of the merchants ; some of my friends came to me, and told me they had heard of designs which I do not care to mention, that they were in the utmost pain for me, and begged of me to agree to any demand that should be made, be it was it would. I own I was intimidated. I went to the coffeehouse, where I found Messirs. W. Molineux, A. Welles, W. Phillips, E. Payne, and W. Dennie, treating with other gentlemen. When they had done with them, after some treaty, I agreed to consider the paper I had signed as in force; and further I promised not to buy of any importer ; But it was no more my own act than as if I had been in prison, or upon the rack, and had made a promise on condition of being set free. They urged my coming to their general agreement ; but I desired they would not insist upon it, and they agreed to receive what I had done. Notwithstanding this, I was afterwards at a town meeting, on the same day, voted with others to have our names recorded as enemies to our country. – The vote indeed was opposed by some, but strongly urged by Mr. Kent the lawyer, and carried ; and I was again hung up in print to publick view. I sent for no goods after I promised, and none arrived until November, when a Parcel came in Capt Cales unexpected The Committee of inspection, as they are called, came to me to know if I should stone my goods, and where : I told them I should put them in my own store. The Committee came divers times to account of them : I told them I had not promised to keep them any certain time ; and what I

did promise was forced out of me, and could not be considered as obligatory. After this they came, the 16th of December, to examine my goods anew : I told them that I could not be interrupted in my business, and would not submit to such slavery any longer : Upon this Capt. Dashwood was in a great rage, challenged me to come out of my house, and he would break my neck, my bones and the like; which may well be supposed to put me in a passion ; and I will hope be some excuse for any indecent expressions from me. – The rest of the gentlemen bring very moderate, I consented Mr. Fletcher, who happened to be present, should shew them the goods, which he did. After this, finding that where there was one person who had imported and was called to account for it, there were ten who had no notice taken of them, and were selling freely, – the partiality was so gross that I openly declared I would sell my goods too ; And for this I am a third time exposed in the newspapers, and charged with breach of faith.

Upon the whole : I cannot help saying, although I never entered far into the mysteries of Government, having applied myself to my shop and my business, that it always seemed strange to me that People who contend so much for civil and religious Liberty, should be so ready to derive others of their natural Liberty; – that men who are guarding against being subject to Laws which they never gave their consent in person or by their representative, should at the same time make Laws, and in the most effectual manner execute them upon me and others, to which Laws I am sure I never gave my consent either in person or by my representative : But what is still more hard, they are Laws made to punish me after I have committed the offence ; for when I sent for my goods I was told nobody was to be compelled to subscribe: After they came I was required to store them ; This in no degree answer the end of the Subscription, which was to distress the manufacturers in England: Now my storing my goods could never do this : The mischief was done when the goods were bought in England ; and it was too late to help it, -- my storing my goods must be considered therefore as punishment for an offence before the Law for punishing it was made.

If one set of private subjects may at any time take upon themselves to punish another set of private Subjects just when they please its such a sort of Government as I never heard of before, and according to my poor notion of Government this is one of the principal things which government is designed to prevent ; and I owe I had rather be a slave under one master ; for if I know who he is, I may perhaps, be able to please him, than a slave to an hundred or more, who I don't know where to find, not what they will expect from me.

Boston, Jan. 9, 1770.

Theophilus Lillie