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Old South Leaflets.

No. 156.

Lexington Town Meetings from 1765 to 1775.

FROM HUDSON'S HISTORY OF LEXINGTON, EMBODYING THE
RESOLUTIONS AND INSTRUCTIONS OF THE TOWN MEETINGS.

The bloody contest with the French and Indians was over. Canada was conquered, and the domain of North America was secured to England. The stern Puritans, who had served so heroically—and we may add prayerfully—in the cause, and who had given success to the arms of Great Britain, were filled with rejoicing. They had proved their devotion to the crown, and had contributed largely to the extension of His Majesty's possessions in North America, and, by so doing, had secured to themselves the great blessing of enjoying undisturbed the freedom of Congregational worship. They also flattered themselves that the king they had served, the country whose interest they had promoted, and the ministry whose administration they had contributed to make illustrious would gratefully remember the services rendered, and treat their faithful colonists, not only with justice, but with generosity.

In this general expectation the good people of Lexington participated. They had experienced the dangers, encountered the hardships, and felt the exhaustion of the war; and they needed repose. Lexington, according to her population, had furnished a large number of men. Her citizens who had rendered distinguished service to their king and country had returned to their homes and families, to engage in their industrial pursuits, to render their families more comfortable, and to retrieve their

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ruined fortunes, and by their manly exertion and strict frugality to bear their share of the taxes incident to the war, and at the same time contribute to the maintenance of civil and religious institutions in their native town. Industry revived in the place, and the people were exerting themselves to improve their highways, and increase the facilities for the education of their children, and thus promote the prosperity of the town. But these dreams of peace and prosperity were disturbed by intimations that the ministry they had served with so much fidelity, and in whose cause they had cheerfully made such sacrifices, instead of requiting these favors with kindness, were meditating a system of unjust exaction and servitude, greater than anything to which the colonists had ever before been subjected.

In fact, while the colonists were freely pouring out their blood and treasure in support of the crown and His Majesty's possessions in America, the ministry were meditating a plan by which the colonists should not only support their own government, but contribute to the maintenance of that power which had oppressed them. This was to be done by enlarging the prerogatives of the home government at the expense of the colonial charters. These contemplated encroachments were looked upon by the people of Massachusetts with peculiar jealousy, and by none more than by the people of Lexington. . . . Their proximity to the town of Boston, against which British tyranny seemed, from the first, to be mainly directed, made them alive to everything which tended to impair the prosperity of their principal market. . . . The men who had fought as faithful English subjects in defence of English institutions, and also to acquire a larger domain for the crown, felt that they were entitled to the rights of English subjects. They had paid too dearly for their homes and firesides to be willing to have them invaded by the nation they had served. The military experience they had had, and the knowledge of arms they had acquired, gave them confidence in their own strength, so that they were not to be intimidated by any threat of enforcing oppressive laws at the point of the bayonet.

There was another general cause in operation in the colonies to make the people jealous of their rights, and awake to the spirit of liberty. The clergy in those days exercised a controlling influence in their respective parishes. In most of the country towns the minister was the only educated man in the place, and consequently was consulted on all great questions more frequently than any other individual. And, as the great theme of that day

was that of religious freedom, the clergy were almost uniformly found on the side of liberty. They knew that religious and civil rights were so nearly allied, that they must stand or fall together. They had taught the necessity of resisting oppression during the French war. The voice of the clergy at that period was on the side of defending our rights at every hazard. "An injured and oppressed people, whose destruction and overthrow is aimed at by unreasonable men, ought, surely, to stand upon their defence, and not tamely submit to their incursions and violence."* Such was the feeling of that day. It pervaded the whole community in a greater or less degree. But in no town was this doctrine inculcated with more force or fidelity than in Lexington. Their clergyman, the Rev. Jonas Clarke, was a man of decided ability, who was capable of comprehending the whole subject in all its bearings, of showing the intimate connection between civil and religious liberty, and of enforcing the high and important duty of fidelity to God, by maintaining the liberties of the people. He not only sympathized with his brethren generally on these subjects, and acted in harmony with them in inculcating the duty of patriotism, but in everything pertaining to human rights, and the sacred obligation to maintain them, he was one who took the lead. . . .

In March, 1765, the first of a series of measures for taxing the colonies passed the British Parliament, and soon after received the sanction of the crown. This roused the just indignation of the American people.

On the 21st of October, 1765, a town meeting was held in Lexington, to see what Instructions the town would give in relation to the Stamp Act. The subject was referred to the selectmen, consisting of James Stone, Thaddeus Bowman, Robert Harrington, Benjamin Brown, and Samuel Stone, Jr., for their consideration, who, being duly prepared, submitted at once a draft of Instructions. It is but justice to the memory of Mr. Clarke to say that this paper, as well as several other able papers recorded in our town book, were from his pen. The committee who reported them, though undoubtedly sensible and patriotic men, laid no claim to that finished scholarship which characterizes this and the other papers to which reference is made. There is internal evidence of their authorship, and it has ever been conceded that they were written by Mr. Clarke; and, as further evidence of the fact, I have now before me the original draft of

* Fast Sermon of Mr. Maccarty, of Worcester, 1759.

one of these papers in Mr. Clarke's own handwriting. The instructions are so fraught with wisdom, so patriotic in their doctrines, and reflect so fully the sentiments of the people of the town who adopted them unanimously, that I will give them in full.

To William Reed, Esq., the present Representative of Lexington:

Sir,—We have looked upon men as beings naturally free. And it is a truth which the history of ages and the common experience of mankind have fully confirmed that a people can never be divested of these invaluable rights and liberties, which are necessary to the happiness of individuals, to the well-being of communities, or to a well-regulated state, but by their own negligence, imprudence, timidity, or rashness. They are seldom lost but when foolishly forfeited or tamely resigned.

And therefore, when we consider the invaluable rights and liberties we now possess, the firmness and resolution of our fathers for the support and preservation of them for us, and how much we owe to ourselves and to posterity, we cannot but look upon it as an unpardonable neglect any longer to delay expressing how deeply we are concerned in some measures adopted by the late ministry, and how much we fear from some acts lately passed in the British Parliament, which appear to us not only distressing to the trade and commerce of this Province, but subversive of several of our most invaluable internal rights, as well as privileges, and from which we apprehend the most fatal consequences.

What of all most alarms us is an Act commonly called the Stamp Act, the full execution of which we apprehend would divest us of our most inestimable charter rights and privileges, rob us of our character as free and natural subjects, and of almost everything we ought, as a people, to hold dear.

Admitting there was no dispute as to the right of Parliament to impose such an Act upon us, yet we cannot forbear complaining of it in itself considered, as unequal and unjust, and a yoke too heavy for us to bear, and that not only as it falls heaviest upon the poor, the widow, and the fatherless and the orphan, not only as it will embarrass the trade and business of this infant country, and so prevent remittances to England, but more especially as the duties and penalties imposed by it are numerous, and so high that it will quickly drain the country of the little cash remaining in it, strip multitudes of their property, and reduce them to poverty, and in a short time render it utterly impossible for the people to subsist under it; and what will be the consequences of this to our friends in Great Britain, as well as to ourselves, is easily seen.*

* By this Act, a ream of bail bonds, *stamped*, cost £100; a ream of common printed ones before had been sold for £15. A ream of *stamped* policies of insurance cost £100; a ream of common ones without stamps, £20. Other papers were taxed in the same proportion.

But we humbly conceive this Act to be directly repugnant to those rights and privileges granted us in our charter, which we always hold sacred, as confirmed to us by the royal word and seal, and as frequently recognized by our Sovereign and the Parliament of Great Britain, wherein it is expressly granted to us and to our children, that we shall have and enjoy all liberties and immunities of free and natural subjects, within any of his Majesty's Dominions, to all intents, constructions, and purposes, as if we were every one of us born in his Majesty's realm of England; and, further, that the full power and authority to impose and levy proportionable and reasonable taxes, upon the estates and persons of all the inhabitants within the Province, for the support and defence of His Majesty's Government, are granted to the General Court or Assembly thereof.

But by this Act a tax, yea, a heavy tax, is imposed, not only without and beside the authority of said General Court, in which this power, which has never been forfeited nor given up, is said to be fully and exclusively lodged, but also in direct opposition to an essential right or privilege of free and natural subjects of Great Britain, who look upon it as their darling and constitutional right never to be taxed but by their own consent, in person or by their Representatives.

It is vain to pretend (as has been pretended) that we are virtually or in any just sense, represented in Parliament, when it is well known that, so far from this, our humble petitions and decent remonstrances, prepared and sent home by the representative body of this people, were not admitted a hearing in Parliament, even at the time when those measures and acts from which we apprehend so much, were depending in the Hon. House of Commons,—a hardship which greatly adds to the grievance, and seems to intimate that we have but too little to hope in consequence of the most humble and dutiful steps.

However, this is not all. By this Act we are most deeply affected, as hereby we are debarred of being tried by juries in case of any breach or supposed breach of it,—a right which, until now, we have held in common with our brethren in England; a right which under Providence has been the great barrier of justice, the support of liberty and property in Great Britain and America; a right which is the glory of the British government.

The Great Charter of England, commonly called Magna Charter, happily provided for all free and natural subjects of the realm of England, that no amercement shall be assessed but by the oath of honest and lawful men of the vicinage, and that no freeman shall be taken or imprisoned or disseised of his freehold or liberties, or free customs, nor passed upon, nor condemned, but by the lawful judgment of his peers, or by the law of the land; but instead of this most important right, such is the extension of power given by this Act to Courts of Admiralty, that all offences against it may be heard and tried and determined in said courts, to the entire subversion of this important right, confirmed to us by the Great Charter and our own.

This we apprehend will open a door to numberless evils which time only can discover. At least it will oftentimes oblige us to risk our fortunes, our liberties, and characters, upon the judgment of one, and perhaps a stranger, or perhaps that which is worse. This will subject us entirely to the mercy of avaricious informers, who may at pleasure summon us from one part of the Province to the other upon suspicion of the least offence, and thus bring upon innocent persons a sort of necessity of pleading guilty by paying the penalty, to avoid a greater expense. And this being the state of things, what will then be necessary but a weak or wicked person for a judge; and from natural and free-born subjects we shall quickly become the most abject slaves, wholly cut off from our last resource,—*hope of redress!*

These, sir, being the real sentiments of us, the freeholders and other inhabitants of the town, of this Act, as in its nature and effects considered, you cannot be surprised to find us greatly alarmed and deeply affected. And, therefore, at the same time that we are firmly resolved in all possible ways to express our filial duty and loyalty to our Sovereign, and a due veneration to both Houses of Parliament, we do also, as concerned for ourselves, our posterity and country, entreat and enjoin it upon you, that so far from encouraging, aiding, or assenting in the execution of this Act, you do rather endeavor, as far as consistent with allegiance and duty to our rightful Sovereign, to promote such measures as, on the contrary, may tend to preserve us in the enjoyment of the invaluable rights and liberties we at present possess, at least till we hear the result of the measures already taken for general redress.

In the mean time we earnestly recommend to you the most calm, decent, and dispassionate measures for our open, explicit, and resolute assertion and vindication of our charter rights and liberties, and that the same be so entered upon record that the world may see, and future generations know, that the present both knew and valued the rights they enjoyed, and did not tamely resign them for chains and slavery. We shall only add that the best economy of the public money is at all times necessary, and never more so than at present, when public debts are heavy, and the people's burdens great and likely to increase.

We take it for granted, therefore, that you will carefully avoid all unaccustomed and unconstitutional grants, which will not only add to the present burden, but make such precedents as will be attended with consequences which may prove greatly to the disadvantage of the public.

Instructions such as these, read in open town meeting, and discussed and adopted by a unanimous vote of the inhabitants, would do much towards creating a just appreciation of their rights as subjects, and of the duties they owed, not only to their Sovereign, but to themselves. A people thus instructed and

trained in the school of stern religious principles would be found ready for almost any emergency. Consequently, when the town of Boston, to manifest their opposition to the oppressive acts of the ministry, resolved that they would not import or use certain articles on which these duties were laid, the inhabitants of Lexington, at a meeting held Dec. 28, 1767, "*Voted unanimously*, To concur with the town of Boston respecting importing and using foreign commodities, as mentioned in their votes, passed at their meeting on the twenty-eighth day of October, 1767."

Nothing of moment occurred in the municipal affairs of the town during the period under review. Roads were repaired, schools were supported, the poor were provided for, and the paramount subject, the maintenance of public worship, received its due share of attention. But the subject which pressed upon them most heavily during this period was the oppression of the mother country. Not, however, that the measures of the British ministry did bear directly and immediately upon them with any distressing hardship at that time. But our patriotic forefathers looked at the principle involved in the measures, and they knew full well that a trifling tax upon stamped paper or upon tea would serve as an entering wedge to a system of taxation which must reduce the colonies to a state of absolute dependence, if not complete vassalage; and patriotism prompted, nay, religion required, that they should oppose the first attempt to trample upon their rights. . . .

On the twenty-first day of September, 1768, the inhabitants of Lexington assembled in town meeting legally warned, "To take into their serious consideration the distressed state of the Province at the present day, and to pass any vote relative thereto." After due consideration they made choice of Isaac Bowman, Esq., William Reed, Esq., and Dea. James Stone "to prepare reasons for our present conduct," who subsequently reported the following Declarations and Resolves:—

Whereas it is the principle in civil society, founded in nature and reason, that no law of the society can be binding on any individual without his consent, given by himself in person, or by his Representative of his own free election; and whereas, in and by an Act of the British Parliament, passed in the first year of the reign of King William and Queen Mary of glorious and blessed memory, entitled an Act declaring the rights and liberties of the subjects, and settling the succession of the crown,—the Preamble of which Act is in these words, namely,—

“*Whereas* the late King James the Second, by the assistance of diverse evil Councillors, Judges, and Ministers employed by him, did endeavor to subvert and extirpate the Protestant religion, and the laws and liberties of the kingdom, it is expressly, among other things, declared that the levying of money for the use of the crown by pretence of prerogative, without grant of Parliament for a longer time, or in other manner than the same is granted, is illegal.”

And whereas, in the third year of the same King William and Queen Mary, their Majesties were graciously pleased, by their Royal Charter, to give and grant to the inhabitants of this his Majesty’s Province all the territory therein described, to be holden in free and common soccage, and also to ordain and grant to the said inhabitants certain rights, liberties, and privileges therein expressly mentioned, among which it is granted, established, and ordained that all and every the subjects of them, their heirs and successors, which shall go to inhabit within said Province and territory, and every of their children which shall happen to be born there, and on the seas in going thither or returning from thence, shall have and enjoy all the liberties and immunities of free and natural subjects, within any of the dominions of them, their heirs and successors, to all intents, purposes, and constructions whatever, as if they and every of them were born within the realm of England.

And whereas, by the aforesaid Act of Parliament, made in the first year of the said King William and Queen Mary, all and singular, the premises contained therein, are claimed, demanded, and insisted on as ‘the undoubted rights and liberties born within the realm; *And whereas* the freeholders and other inhabitants of this town in said charter mentioned do hold all the rights and liberties therein contained to be sacred and inviolable, at the same time publicly and solemnly acknowledging their firm and unshaken allegiance to their alone rightful Sovereign King George the Third, the lawful successor of the said King William and Queen Mary to the British throne:—

Therefore, Resolved, That the freeholders and other inhabitants of the town of Lexington will, at the utmost peril of their lives and fortunes, take all legal and constitutional measures to defend and maintain the person, family, crown, and dignity of our said Sovereign Lord, George the Third, and all and singular the rights, liberties, privileges, and immunities granted in said royal charter, as well as those which are declared to be belonging to us as British subjects, by birthright, as all others therein specially mentioned.

And whereas, by the said Royal Charter, it is specially granted to the Great and General Court or Assembly therein constituted to impose and levy proportionable and reasonable assessments, rates, and taxes upon the estates and persons of all and every the proprietors and inhabitants of the said Province or territory, for the service of the king in the necessary defence and support of his government of the Province, and the protection and preservation of his subjects therein:

Therefore, Voted, As the opinion of this town, that levying money within this Province for the use and service of the crown in any other manner than the same is granted by the Great and General Court or Assembly of this Province is in violation of the said Royal Charter; and the same is in violation of the undoubted, natural rights of subjects, declared in the aforesaid Act of Parliament, freely to give and grant their own money for the service of the crown, with their own consent in person, or by Representatives of their own free election.

And whereas, in the aforesaid Act of Parliament, it is declared that the raising and keeping a standing army within the kingdom in time of peace, unless it be with the consent of Parliament, is against law, it is the opinion of this town that the said Declaration is founded in the indefeasible rights of the subjects to be consulted, and to give their free consent in person or by Representative, of their own free election, to the raising and keeping a standing army among them. And the inhabitants of this town, being free subjects, have the same rights derived from nature, and confirmed by the British Constitution, as well as by the Royal Charter; and, therefore, the raising or keeping a standing army without their consent in person or by representatives of their own free election would be an infringement of their natural, constitutional, and charter rights. And the employment of such an army for the enforcing of laws made without the consent of the people in person or by their representatives would be a grievance.

The foregoing Report being several times distinctly read and considered by the town, the question was put whether the same shall be accepted and recorded, and passed unanimously in the affirmative.

The following vote was also unanimously passed:—

Whereas, by an Act of Parliament of the first of King William and Queen Mary, it is declared, that for the redress of all grievances and for amending, strengthening, and preserving the laws, Parliament ought to be held frequently; and inasmuch, as it is the opinion of this town that the people of this Province labor under many grievances, which, unless speedily redressed, threaten the total destruction of our invaluable, natural, constitutional, and charter rights; and, furthermore, as his Excellency the Governor, at the request of the town of Boston, has declared himself unable to call a General Court, which is the Assembly of the States of this Province for the redress of grievances,—

Voted, That this town will now make choice of some suitable person to join with such as are or may be appointed and sent from the several other towns in this Province, to consult and advise what may be best for the public good at this critical juncture.

Then made choice of William Reed, Esq.

Also Voted, To keep a day of prayer on the occasion, and left it to the Rev. Mr. Clarke to appoint the time.

These sentiments published in open town meeting, and sanctified by a day of fasting and prayer, would, of course, govern the conduct of a sincere and conscientious people. No wonder therefore, we find them, in 1769, ready to make what at the present day would in some families be considered a great sacrifice, by voting "not to use any tea or snuff, nor keep them, nor suffer them to be used in our families, till the duties are taken off."

In 1772 a measure was on foot to make the Supreme Judges independent of the people, by granting them a salary directly by Parliament, thus taking from the people the only hold they had upon those officers,—that of withholding supplies. This measure was no sooner talked of than the alarm was given.

At a meeting of the inhabitants of Lexington, held Dec. 31, 1772, the following resolves were passed:—

1. That it is the natural right and indisputable duty of every man, and consequently of every society or body of men, to consult their own safety, and to take measures for the preservation of their own liberty and property, without which life itself can scarcely be deemed worth possessing.

2. That the security of life, liberty, and property to a people is, and ought always to be considered, as the great end of all government, and is acknowledged to be the professed end of the happy constitution of the British Government in particular.

3. That when through imperfections, necessarily attendant upon the wisest systems of which fallible men are capable, or through the designs of wicked or crafty men in places of power and trust, any laws or acts of government are found to be obnoxious or oppressive to the subject, it is wisely provided and established by Magna Charta, the Petition of Rights, and other statutes of England, that not only counties, cities, and corporations, but also towns and individuals, may consult and adopt measures for redress by petition, remonstrance, or other ways, as occasion and the emergency of affairs may require.

4. That the inhabitants of this town and Province by the Royal Charter (a sacred compact between them and the crown) being vested with all the rights and privileges of Englishmen, and British subjects have the indisputable right, both as a people and as individuals, to judge for themselves when laws or measures of government are obnoxious or oppressive, and to consult upon, and adopt the best measures in their power for redress when oppressed.

5. And, therefore, That as the inhabitants of this town look upon themselves, in common with their brethren and fellow-subjects through the Province, to be greatly injured and oppressed in various instances

by measures of Government lately adopted, especially by the proposed measure of making the judges dependent upon the crown alone for their support, they cannot but judge it their inalienable right and a duty they owe to themselves and posterity, as a town as well as individuals, to take these matters into serious consideration, freely to express their sentiments concerning them, and consult measures for redress.

Then *voted* that a committee of seven be chosen to report to the town at an adjournment of this meeting, a draft of Instructions for their Representative, also of such further Votes and Resolves, as they may think best to recommend to the town.—Then made choice of William Reed, Esq., Isaac Bowman, Esq., Capt. Thaddeus Bowman, Dea. Benjamin Brown, Mr. Samuel Bridge, Dea. Joseph Loring, and Mr. Joseph Simonds.

At an adjourned meeting held Jan. 5, 1772, this committee submitted the following document, fraught with the wisdom and patriotism of their pious and devoted pastor, which was unanimously adopted:—

To Mr. Jonas Stone, Representative of the Town of Lexington:

Sir,—It is not to call in question your capacity, disposition, or fidelity, of which we have given the fullest evidence in the choice we have made of you to represent us in the General Court of this Province, but in exercising our right of instructing our Representatives, to open our minds freely to you upon matters which appear to us interesting to ourselves, to the Province, and to posterity, and to strengthen and confirm you in measures which, we trust, your own judgment would have suggested, as necessary and important to our common safety and prosperity, though we had been silent.

Our worthy ancestors, after many struggles with their enemies in the face of every danger and at the expense of much treasure and blood, secured to themselves and transmitted to us their posterity a fair and rich inheritance, not only of a pleasant and fertile land, but also of invaluable rights and privileges, both as men and Christians, as stated in the Royal Charter of the Province, and secured to us by the faith of the British Crown and Kingdom. As we hold due allegiance to our rightful Sovereign, King George III., and are ready with our lives and fortunes to support his just and constitutional government, so we look upon ourselves as bound by the most sacred ties, to the utmost of our power, to maintain and defend ourselves in our charter rights and privileges, and, as a sacred trust committed to us, to transmit them inviolate to succeeding generations.

It is the general voice, at least of the more thinking and judicious among us, that our charter rights and liberties are in danger, are infringed, and upon the most careful, mature, and serious consideration of them, as stated in our Charter, and comparing them with Acts of the British Parliament, and measures adopted by the British Court,

Ministry, and Government, relating to this and other American Colonies, some of which have been carried into execution among us, we are clearly of opinion that they have been for some time past, and are at present, greatly infringed and violated hereby in various instances, and these measures have been gone into from time to time by the Honorable Council and House of Representatives of the Province for relief and redress; yet, so far from being successful, our Grievances seem to increase and be more and more intolerable every day.

The unhappy and distressing effects of the measures referred to are too many to admit, and too well known and felt to require a particular mention. But we cannot forbear observing the glowing contrast which, in some instances, is to be seen, between our Charter and the Resolves and Acts of the British Parliament, and measures of administration, adopted by the British Court, respecting the people of this, as well as other Colonies.

The Charter grants to our General Court full power and authority from time to time to make, ordain, and establish all manner of reasonable laws, &c., and that such laws, &c., not being disallowed by the King within three years, shall continue in full force until the expiration thereof, or until repealed by the same authority. But the British Parliament have resolved that they have a right to make laws, binding upon the Colonies in all cases whatsoever, so that, whenever they please to carry this resolve into execution, they may by another resolve, passed into an Act, by one powerful stroke vacate our Charter, and in a moment dash all our laws out of existence or bury them together in one common ruin. By the Charter the right of taxing the people is lodged in the General Court of the Province, and we think exclusively. But by the late revenue Acts, which have been, with so many ensigns of power and terror, in open violations of the laws and liberties of this people, put into execution by the Commissioners of the Customs, this right is clearly infringed, and the power put into and exercised by other hands.

By the Charter we are vested with all the rights and liberties of British subjects, one of which we know is in Magna Charta declared to be that of trial by jury, and that no freeman shall be disseised of his freehold, liberties, &c., but by the lawful judgment of his peers, &c. But such is the provision made in the revenue Act, and such the exercise of the power of courts of admiralty, that men may be disseised of their liberty, and carried from one part of the country to the other, and be tried and sentenced by one judge, for any, even the smallest breach of this Act, whether real or supposed. Though the Charter provides for the erecting of judicatories for the hearing and trying all manner of offences, as well criminal and capital as civil, yet, if we are rightly informed, a late Act of Parliament provides, and directs in some cases, that persons may be seized and carried to England for trial, and that for life. Should this be the truth, where is the right of freemen,—where the boasted liberty of English subjects?

The Charter represents the Governor of this Province as Captain General, and as having full power and authority in all military and warlike affairs, and of himself to appoint all military officers, to erect forts and commit them to the custody of such person or persons as to him shall seem meet. But can it be said that this is the truth in fact, when the Governor himself declares that he has no authority over those who have custody of the most important fortress, and where garrisons are changed and officers appointed, not only not by the Governor, but without his knowledge or consent. Whether this is the state of Castle William, the principal fortress of this Province, appears to us to be a question not unworthy the serious attention and most critical inquiry of the Great and General Court.

The Charter not only vests the General Court with the right of imposing taxes, but also points out the ends for which taxes are to be raised, one of which is the support of the government, justly supposing that necessary connection between the governing and governed, and that mutual dependence which preserves a due balance between them, which in all well-regulated States has been found to have the happiest tendency to promote good government on the one hand and cheerful obedience on the other. But not enough that the right of taxation is violated, but the right of determining the merit and services of those that are employed in government must be yielded too. Thus, with respect to the first officers among us, the only remaining interest whereby persons in the service of the public were induced to be faithful in their trust to the people is dissolved; and, being entirely dependent upon the crown for both place and support, it becomes their interest, at least in many cases, to be unfaithful and partial in their administration with regard to the people. And, considering the imperfections of human nature, it is scarcely possible it should be otherwise, even though the best of men were in authority. For interest will have its influence to blind the eyes and pervert the judgment of the wisest and most upright.

We have been certified in form that this is the case with the gentlemen in the chief seat of Government, and at the head of the Province, and, from the best information we are able to obtain, we have but too much reason to fear that the same has taken place with respect to a number of others in places of trust and power, of no small importance to the well-being of this people. Particularly we have reason to think this to be the fact with respect to the Judges of the Supreme Court, the highest court of justice in the Province,—the court upon the decisions and determinations of which all our interests respecting property, liberty, or life, do chiefly and ultimately depend; and what adds to the indignity of this measure is that it is to be carried into effect, as we have just reason to suppose, at our expense, at the same time that it is against our consent. Thus the plan of oppression is begun, and so far carried on that, if our enemies are still successful, and no means can be found to put a stop to their career, no measures contrived for

a restoration of our affairs to a constitutional course, as pointed out in our Charter, we have just reason to fear that the eyes of the Government being blinded, the sources of justice poisoned, and hands of the administration bribed with interest, the system of slavery will soon be complete. These things are of so interesting a nature, so deeply affecting, and so big with the ruin of all our rights and liberties, both civil and religious, that we readily acknowledge that we cannot so much as transiently view them without a mixture of horror, indignation, and grief.

But this is not all. Our Charter knows no such thing as instructions to Government; and yet what have not instructions done to distress this people? And if, in addition to these, it should be found upon the inquiry of the guardians of the Province in General Court assembled (and they have a right to inquire) that the law has not in all instances had its course, or that at any time measures have been successful to stay justice from offenders, it seems as if it was time to be alarmed, and provide for our own safety, or else tamely to bow to the yoke, and forever hereafter be silent. Whether this representation be just is submitted, and must be left to time and facts to discover. But that these, among other things, are worthy our most serious attention, as subjects of inquiry and deep interest, cannot be disputed.

And therefore to you, Sir, whom we have chosen to represent us in the Great and General Court of Inquest for this Province, we do most earnestly recommend it, that you use your utmost influence that these, as well as all other matters in which the rights and liberties of this people are concerned, are impartially inquired into and dispassionately considered by the General Assembly, and that measures be pursued by Petition to the throne or otherwise, as the Court in their great wisdom shall see meet, for a radical and lasting redress. That thus, whether successful or not, succeeding generations might know that we understood our rights and liberties, and were neither afraid nor ashamed to assert and maintain them, and that we ourselves may have at least this consolation in our chains, that it was not through our neglect that this people were enslaved.

WILLIAM REED, *Per Order.*

At the same meeting the town took into consideration a communication from the town of Boston on the same general subject, and

Voted, That this town entirely concur with them in their sentiments, both as to the nature of our rights and the high infraction of them by the late measures of Government, and with pleasure embrace this opportunity to express the great sense they have of the vigilance and patriotic spirit they and our brethren in many other towns have discovered upon this and various occasions, for the preservation of our rights.

Voted, also, That this town has a right to correspond with other towns upon matters of common concern, and that a Committee be accordingly chosen to transmit the proceeding of this meeting to the Gentlemen of the Committee of Correspondence in Boston; and, further, to correspond with them, as well as the Committee of other towns, upon matters of common concern, as occasion may require.

The town then proceeded and chose the following-named gentlemen as their Committee of Correspondence: Capt. Thaddeus Bowman, Dea. Jonas Stone, Ensign Robert Harrington, Dea. Benjamin Brown, and Dea. Joseph Loring.

The opposition to the Stamp Act was such that Parliament was induced to repeal it, which they did in 1766. But this was a change rather than an abandonment of their policy. They repealed an act which they saw that they could not enforce, for the purpose of adopting other measures which they deemed more likely to bring the colonists to their feet.

In December, 1773, the inhabitants were called together to consider the state of public affairs, and especially the subject of the Tea, sent over by the East India Company, when the whole subject was referred to the Committee of Correspondence, who subsequently submitted the following Report, which was unanimously adopted:—

That from intelligence transmitted by the Committee of Correspondence in the Town of Boston to the Committee of Correspondence for this place, and by them communicated to the town, it appears that the enemies of the rights and liberties of America, greatly disappointed in the success of the Revenue Act, are seeking to avail themselves of a new, and, if possible, yet more detestable measure to distress, enslave, and destroy us. Not enough that a tax was laid upon teas, which should be imported by us, for the sole purpose of raising a revenue to support taskmasters, pensioners, &c., in idleness and luxury, but by a late Act of Parliament, to appease the wrath of the East India Company, whose trade to America had been greatly clogged by the operation of the Revenue Acts, provision is made for said Company to export their Teas to America free, and discharged from the payment of all duties and customs in England, but liable to all the same rules, regulations, penalties, and forfeitures in America, as are provided by the Revenue Act, as much as if the above-mentioned Act had never been passed.

Not to say anything of the gross partiality herein discovered in favor of the East India Company, and to the injury and oppression of Americans, we are alarmed at the masterly effort of iniquitous policy, as it has the most gloomy effect upon the trade of these colonies and gives an opening to the East India Company, or others under the covert

of an Act of Parliament, for the unrighteous purpose of raising and securing a revenue to the crown out of the purses of industrious Americans, to monopolize one branch after another, until in the process of time the whole trade will be in their hands, and by their consignees, factors, &c., they will be the sole merchants of America.

And, further, we are more especially alarmed, as by these crafty measures the Revenue Act is to be established, and the rights and liberties of Americans forever sapped and destroyed. These appear to us to be sacrifices we must make, and these are the costly pledges that must be given into the hands of the oppressor. The moment we receive this detested article, the tribute will be established upon us. For nothing short of this will ever fill the mouth of the oppressor, or gorge the insatiate appetite of lust and ambition. Once admit this subtle, wicked ministerial plan to take place, once permit this tea, thus imposed upon us by the East India Company, to be landed, received, and vended by their consignees, factors, &c., the badge of our slavery is fixed, the foundation of ruin is surely laid; and, unless a wise and powerful God, by some unforeseen revolution in Providence, shall prevent, we shall soon be obliged to bid farewell to the once flourishing trade of America, and an everlasting adieu to those glorious rights and liberties for which our worthy ancestors so earnestly prayed, so bravely fought, so freely bled!

This being the light in which we view these measures of administration in their nature and tendency, we cannot but be alarmed, especially when we see our danger so great, our ruin so nearly effected, the ship with the detested tribute Tea in the harbor, and the persons appointed to receive and sell the same unnaturally refusing to resign their appointment, though by carrying it into effect, they should procure their country's ruin. As therefore we should be wanting to ourselves, to our country and posterity, to be silent upon such an occasion as this, and as we have no reason to expect that God, the Supreme Disposer of all things, will work miracles for us, while we neglect ourselves, we do with the greatest seriousness and sincerity come into the following

RESOLVES.

1. That as the Revenue Act, and the Act allowing the East India Company to export Teas into the Colonies subject to duties, with all the measures of the Ministry and Administration, whether by secret craft or open violence to carry said Acts into effect, appear to us to be a direct violation of our charter rights and liberties, we are determined to the utmost of our power in every rational way, upon this and all proper occasions, to oppose them, and use our most vigilant and resolute endeavors to prevent their taking place among us.

2. That we will not be concerned either directly or indirectly in landing, receiving, buying, or selling, or even using any of the Teas sent out by the East India Company, or that shall be imported subject

to a duty imposed by Act of Parliament, for the purpose of raising a revenue in America.

3. That all such persons as shall directly or indirectly aid and assist in landing, receiving, buying, selling, or using the Teas sent by the East India Company, or imported by others subject to a duty, for the purpose of a revenue, shall be deemed and treated by us as enemies of their country.

4. That the conduct of Richard Clarke and son, the Governor's two sons, Thomas and Elisha Hutchinson, and other consignees, in refusing to resign their appointment as factors, or vendue masters for the East India Company, when repeatedly requested by the town of Boston, has justly rendered them obnoxious to their fellow-citizens, to the inhabitants of this town, and to the people of the Province, and America in general; and, as upon this occasion they have discovered, not only want of due affection for their native country, but also from selfish views (as we think), a strange disposition to accelerate its ruin, we cannot but consider them as objects of our just resentment, indignation, and contempt.

5. That, as it has been basely insinuated that the measures taken to prevent the reception of the East India Company's Teas are the effect of a scheme of the merchants to advance their own interest, it is the opinion of this town that the suggestion is false and malicious, and designed at the same time to deceive and delude the people into a compliance with measures of their enemies, and to prevent the good effect of the honest and patriotic endeavors of so valuable and powerful part of the community to rescue the trade and liberties of their country from impending destruction.

6. That, as with gratitude to our brethren in Boston and other towns we do express our satisfaction in the measures they have taken, and the struggles they have made upon this, as well as many other occasions, for the liberties of their country and America, we are ready and resolved to concur with them in every rational measure that may be necessary for the preservation or recovery of our rights and liberties as Englishmen and Christians; and we trust in God that, should the state of our affairs require it, *we shall be ready to sacrifice our estates and everything dear in life, yea, and life itself, in support of the common cause.*

The above Resolves being passed, a motion was made that to them another should be added. Accordingly, it was resolved without a dissenting voice,—

That if any head of a family in this town, or any person, shall from this time forward, and until the duty be taken off, purchase any Tea, or sell or consume any Tea in their families, such person shall be looked upon as an enemy to this town, and to this country, and shall by this town be treated with neglect and contempt.

At a meeting of the inhabitants of Lexington, duly warned, on the 26th of September, 1774, Dea. Stone was chosen to represent the town in the General Court. A committee, consisting of Capt. Bowman, Dea. Brown, and Lieut. Edmund Munroe, was chosen to prepare Instructions, who reported the following draft, which was adopted:—

The alarming situation of our public affairs being so distressing as at present, and our Council being chosen by a mandamus from the King, whose authority as a Council we cannot own, nor consent to,—

We, therefore, the inhabitants of the town of Lexington, being assembled at the Meeting-house in said town, on Monday, the twenty-sixth day of September instant, to make choice of a Representative, and having made choice of Dea. Stone as our Representative, we, putting the fullest confidence in your integrity and ability, do instruct you, Sir, in the following manner, to use your utmost influence at the Great and General Court, that nothing there be transacted as a Court, under the new Council, or in conformity with any of the late Acts of Parliament.

At the same meeting they chose Dea Stone a delegate to the Provincial Congress. Having repeatedly denounced the acts of the Ministry and Parliament, as acts of oppression, designed to rob the people of the Colonies of every right which they held dear, and having pledged their *fortunes and their lives*, should the occasion require, in defence of the great principles of liberty, like men who knew what they said, and said what they meant, the inhabitants of the town made preparation for the last resort of oppressed subjects. Consequently, at meetings held in November and December, they voted “to provide a suitable quantity of flints,” “to bring two pieces of cannon from Watertown and mount them,” “to provide a pair of drums for the use of the military company in town,” “to provide bayonets at the town’s cost for one-third of the training soldiers,” to “have the militia and alarm list meet for a view of their arms,” &c.; and, that these votes should not prove a mere dead letter, committees were chosen to carry them into effect.

Besides, as the Provincial Congress had recommended to the people to put themselves in a state of defence by organizing military companies, to be armed and equipped, and to be ready to march at the shortest notice, it was voted by the inhabitants of Lexington that they would carry out these recommendations; and committees were appointed for that purpose. As the Congress had also chosen Henry Gardner, Esq., of Stow, to be Re-

ceiver General of all province taxes which should be collected, and requested the several towns to pay their respective portions of the taxes, when collected, over to him, instead of paying them over to Harrison Gray, Esq., His Majesty's Receiver General, the people directed their collectors to pay the province tax, when collected, over to Henry Gardner, Esq., and assured them by solemn vote that the town would see them harmless for so doing. These "awful notes of preparation" showed that the people were prepared for any emergency, and firmly resolved to maintain their rights by the sword, if remonstrance and entreaty should prove ineffectual. We do not claim for the town of Lexington any exclusive honor in this respect. But we do say that no town, under all the circumstances, is deserving of more praise. . . .

I have been thus particular in presenting the acts and doings of the inhabitants of Lexington preparatory to the opening of hostilities; for, after all, we are to contemplate the American Revolution not so much in the strife upon the ensanguined field as in the cool deliberation and the firm resolve which characterized our people at the period immediately preceding the open rupture. I have been thus particular in order to present to the public those valuable state papers, written by the Rev. Jonas Clarke, which prepared our people, not only for the contest, but for the just appreciations of rational and constitutional liberty. It is an easy thing in times of excitement to arouse the passions of men, and nerve their arms for battle,—“to teach their hands to war and their fingers to fight.” But to instil into their minds the great principles of civil and religious liberty, and make them realize their duty as citizens, is a more difficult task. But this has been done in a clear and able manner in the documents above cited. So fully and so clearly are the grievances under which our fathers labored and the causes which gave rise to the American Revolution set forth that, if all other records were destroyed, and all recollections blotted from the memory, the faithful historian could, from the Instructions given to the Representatives of Lexington, and the other papers found in our Records, emanating from the pen of Mr. Clarke, trace the developments of oppression from year to year, and state the true causes of that mighty struggle. . . .

Those, therefore, who contemplate the Revolution as commencing on the 19th of April, 1775, must look at effects rather than at causes, and suffer their minds to rest upon the outward and visible rather than penetrate the great moral causes operat-



ing by fixed and certain laws, which had been developing themselves for more than a century. The rash act of Pitcairn at Lexington Common was by no means the cause of the Revolution. It was merely the accidental occurrence which opened the drama at that time and place. The tragedy had been written, the great parts assigned, and the grand result penned by the recording angel; and, if the first act had not been opened at Lexington and Concord, it must have transpired on some other field. Otis and Adams opened the battle of the Revolution long before the bayonet was fixed or the sword drawn. Clarke's Instructions to our Representatives did as much to make the patriots stand firm on the Common in the very face of a superior force as did the stern command of the gallant Parker.

The town meeting is the most characteristic and most potent political institution evolved and contributed to the world by New England. "Those wards called townships in New England," said Jefferson, "are the vital principle of their governments, and have proved themselves the wisest invention ever devised by the wit of man for the perfect exercise of self-government, and for its preservation." "Nations which are accustomed to township institutions and municipal government," said De Tocqueville, "are better able than any other to found prosperous colonies. The habit of thinking and governing for one's self is indispensable in a new country." Lecky expresses the opinion that it was the vigor of the town governments and local institutions more than to anything else that was due the supremacy of England in America, the successful colonization out of which grew at last the United States, and that France failed precisely for want of this. Parkman repeatedly emphasizes this contrast in his volumes. Mill, Freeman, Emerson, Richard Henry Lee, and many others have treated this subject. See their testimony referred to in the last chapter of Hosmer's *Life of Samuel Adams*. Samuel Adams, "the last of the Puritans," "the father of the American Revolution," is also well called pre-eminently "the man of the town meeting." Bancroft speaks of him as "the truest representative of the home rule of Massachusetts in its town meetings and General Court."

Never did the town meeting show itself so powerful or impressive as in New England during the dozen years preceding the outbreak of the Revolution. The Boston town meeting, under the lead of Samuel Adams and his great associates, showed itself, in the dignity and strength of its public declarations, its speeches and its acts, more than a match for the British Parliament; and the seriousness and nobility of the meetings in a score of the larger towns which supported Boston are unparalleled in simple local annals. The resolutions and instructions framed in many of them would do honor to the world's historic parliaments. The Lexington records given in the present leaflet are matched by the records of many of our historic towns. See references in Barry's *History of Massachusetts*, ii. 453-458. See the accounts of the proceedings in New England during the decade preceding the Revolution in Bancroft, Fiske, Palfrey, Trevelyan, and other histories of the period. See chapter on the Town Meeting in Fiske's "American Political Ideas," the chapters on Local Government in Bryce's "American Commonwealth," the paper on the Colonial Town Meeting in Hart's "Practical Essays in American Government," sections in Woodrow Wilson's "The State," and references in Channing and Hart's "Guide to American History," pp. 271, 313, etc.

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