

## Letter from a Farmer in Pennsylvania (I)

John Dickinson / *Pennsylvania Gazette*

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*In twelve essays widely read in colonial newspapers and soon printed as a pamphlet, John Dickinson stoked American resolve to weather Britain's increased restrictions and bemoaned the complacency exhibited by Americans after the repeal of the Stamp Act in 1766. The son of a prominent Quaker family, John Dickinson (1732-1808) was born on his family's tobacco plantation in Maryland. A lawyer and colonial legislator, he served in the First and Second Continental Congresses but refused to sign the Declaration of Independence because he believed the colonies were not ready to sever themselves from Great Britain. Nonetheless, he fought against the British as an officer in the Pennsylvania Militia and after the Revolution played a significant role in the life of the nation. Many Americans saw the demand to feed and house British soldiers as a tax upon the colonists, no less pernicious than the tax imposed by the Stamp Act. When the New York Assembly refused to comply fully with the Quartering Act (partly due to a budget shortfall), Parliament in effect dissolved the assembly until it would capitulate. In his first letter, Dickinson spells out the implications of the punishment Parliament visited upon New York. "If they [the people of New York] may be legally deprived . . . of the privilege of legislation, why may they not, with equal reason, be deprived of every other privilege?" Parliament, Dickinson argues, is attempting to compel the people of New York to submit to its will. He sees no difference between such legislative compulsion and the use of troops. Making his case with careful logic, he continually points out that what affects one colony affects all of them.*

Beloved Countrymen,

I AM a Farmer, settled, after a Variety of Fortunes, near the Banks of the River Delaware, in the Province of Pennsylvania. I received a liberal Education, and have been engaged in the busy Scenes of Life; but am now convinced, that a Man may be as happy without Bustle, as with it. My Farm is small; my Servants are few, and good; I have a little Money at Interest; I wish for no more; my Employment in my own Affairs is easy; and with a contented grateful Mind, undisturbed by worldly Hopes or Fears, relating to myself, I am compleating the Number of Days allotted to me by Divine Goodness.

Being Master of my Time, I spend a good Deal of it in a Library, which I think the most valuable Part of my small Estate; and being acquainted with two or three Gentlemen of Abilities and Learning, who honour me with their Friendship, I have acquired, I believe, a greater Knowledge in History, and the Laws and Constitution of my Country, than is generally attained by Men of my Class, many of them not being so fortunate as I have been in the

Opportunities of getting Information.

From my Infancy I was taught to love Humanity and Liberty. Enquiry and Experience have since confirmed my Reverence for the Lessons then given me, by convincing me more fully of their Truth and Excellence. Benevolence towards Mankind, excites Wishes for their Welfare, and such Wishes endear the Means of fulfilling them. These can be found in Liberty only: Therefore her sacred Cause ought to be espoused, by every Man, on every Occasion, to the utmost of his Power. As a charitable, but poor Person does not withhold his Mite, because he cannot relieve all the Distresses of the Miserable, so let not any honest Man suppress his Sentiments concerning Freedom, however small their Influence is likely to be. Perhaps he “may touch some Wheel,” that will have an Effect greater than he expects.

These being my Sentiments, I am encouraged to offer to you, my Countrymen, my Thoughts on some late Transactions, that appear to me to be of the utmost Importance to you. Conscious of my own Defects, I have waited some Time, in Expectation of seeing the Subject treated by Persons much better qualified for the Task; but being therein disappointed, and apprehensive that longer Delays will be injurious, I venture at length to request the Attention of the Public, praying only for one Thing, that is, that these Lines may be read with the same Zeal for the Happiness of British America, with which they were wrote.

With a good deal of Surprize I have observed, that little Notice has been taken of an Act of Parliament, as injurious in its Principle to the Liberties of these Colonies, as the Stamp Act was: I mean the Act for suspending the Legislation of New-York.

[omitted discussion of the New York Restraining Act]

With Concern I have observed, that two Assemblies of this Province have sat and adjourned, without taking any Notice of this Act. It may perhaps be asked, what would have been proper for them to do? I am by no Means fond of inflammatory Measures; I detest them. I should be sorry that any thing should be done, which might justly displease our Sovereign, or our Mother Country: But a firm, modest Exertion of a free Spirit, should never be wanting on public Occasions. It appears to me, that it would have been sufficient for the Assembly, to have ordered our Agents to represent to the King’s Ministers, their Sense of the suspending Act, and to pray for its Repeal. Thus we should have borne our Testimony against it; and might therefore reasonably expect that, on a like Occasion, we might receive the same Assistance from the other Colonies.

A FARMER.

*Concordia Res parvæ crescunt.*

Small Things grow great by Concord.