

JOHN MEIN OF BOSTON

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. BACKGROUND AND EARLY ACTIVITIES	12
III. THE CHOOSING OF SIDES	32
IV. THE NON-IMPORTATION DISPUTE	44
V. CONCLUSIONS	84
BIBLIOGRAPHY	91
APPENDIX A	97
APPENDIX B	100

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of this study is to focus attention on John Mein of Boston. He is one of American history's little known, yet highly significant figures. As a journalist and co-publisher of the Boston Chronicle from 1767 to 1770, he was instrumental in bringing about a failure of the second Non-Importation Agreement entered into by Boston merchants as an effort to force a repeal of the Townshend Acts.

In addition to using his many talents to help bring about a breakdown of the non-importation movement, Mein is important to history for his probable authorship of an influential set of articles in the London Public Ledger under the title of Sagittarius' Letters, circulated in pamphlet form in 1774. These letters became an important source of support for the passage of the Boston Port Bill, the alteration of the Massachusetts Bay Colony's charter, and other punitive measures taken against the colonies in 1774.

While the study covers Mein's activities from 1764 to 1774, special attention is given to the period from 1767 to 1770. During this time he was involved in a fiery dispute with John Hancock and other Boston merchants who had organized the non-importation movement. An attempt was made to

trace Mein's career following his hasty exit from the colonies in 1770, but this did not meet with much success. Little is known about his later life, except that he was in King's Bench Prison for debts he could not pay.

Mein first established himself in America as a Boston bookseller. This led him to establish the first circulating library in New England and eventually to enter the publishing business. He brought a number of innovations to the printing industry in America, including the use of a new type face which he employed in the publication of his newspaper. His newspaper, The Boston Chronicle, was the most readable of all Boston newspapers, and the first in New England to be published twice weekly. It contained many articles of scientific curiosity, farming interest, and was heavily laden with articles taken from the London papers. He often serialized writings in his newspaper that later appeared in book or pamphlet form.

Mein published a large number of books, pamphlets, and songs. He often used London labels on his earlier work as he found they sold better than colonial productions. Several of his earlier publications were overlooked until this bit of deception was uncovered by recent investigations. His contributions to the publishing industry appear to be more significant than earlier realized.

The primary source materials used in this study were micro-card copies of Mein's newspaper, The Boston Chronicle.¹ Each issue was read beginning with the first for Monday, December 21, 1767, to the final issue for Thursday, June 21, 1770. Articles of particular interest were copied verbatim, for use in this study. As Mein's paper presented the Tory viewpoint, the Boston News-Letter² was of particular value since it represented the opposing Whig opinion. It is also available on micro-cards, as are other early American newspapers, at the William Allen White Library at Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia.

One of the most important sources for biographical sketches of Mein and his partner John Fleeming, as well as for other printers of the day, is Isaiah Thomas' History of Printing in America.³ This reference provides insight into the many problems of early American printers and descriptions of the print shops and their proprietors. Both volumes of Lorenzo Sabine's Biographical Sketches of Loyalists of the

¹The Boston Chronicle: this reference is available on micro-cards produced by the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

²Boston News-Letter: also available on micro-cards. A valuable reference for the Whig point of view.

³Isaiah Thomas, The History of Printing in America (Albany, N.Y.: American Antiquarian Society, 1874), II, pp. 151-54, refer directly to Mein and his partner, John Fleeming.

American Revolution⁴ contains sketches of Mein and Fleeming, but were of more limited use. Thomas Hutchinson's History of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts-Bay⁵ contains valuable background information on the non-importation dispute, and an account of what happened to Mein at the hands of a Boston mob.

One of the most valuable of the secondary sources used in this study is Arthur M. Schlesinger's The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution.⁶ This is the basic work on the subject and is an excellent source for general information of the period. A more recent contribution from the same author, Prelude to Independence, The Newspaper War on Britain, 1763-1776,⁷ was also useful. Another source of interesting and valuable information of a more direct usefulness concerning the controversy of non-importation is

⁴Lorenzo Sabine, Biographical Sketches of Loyalists of the American Revolution, 2 volumes (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1864), I, p. 427; II, p. 78.

⁵Lawrence S. Mayo (ed.), Thomas Hutchinson, The History of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts-Bay, 3 volumes (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), III, pp. 185-88.

⁶Arthur M. Schlesinger, The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, 1763-1776 (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1957), pp. 157-178.

⁷Arthur M. Schlesinger, Prelude to Independence, The Newspaper War on Britain, 1763-1776 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), pp. 103-108.

Oliver M. Dickerson's The Navigation Acts and the American Revolution.⁸

Specific references to the organization of Boston merchants prior to and during the non-importation movement were readily available. The basic study was a lengthy article by Charles M. Andrews and published in the Colonial Society of Massachusetts Publications in 1917.⁹ Andrews traced the history of the Boston merchants' organization from its earliest inception as regular meetings in front of the British Coffee House to its formal organization in 1774. His references to Mein were most valuable. Also helpful, but to a lesser degree, was information from James T. Adams' Revolutionary New England¹⁰ and Robert Brown's Middle Class Democracy and the Revolution in Massachusetts, 1691-1780.¹¹

More recent investigations shed new light on the non-importation movement and its participants. Of special

⁸Oliver M. Dickerson, The Navigation Acts and the American Revolution (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1951). Of particular interest is Part II, "Dissolving the Cement of Empire."

⁹Charles M. Andrews, "The Boston Merchants and the Non-Importation Movement," Colonial Society of Massachusetts, Publications, XIX (1916-1917), pp. 159-259.

¹⁰James Truslow Adams, Revolutionary New England (Boston: Atlantic Monthly, 1923), pp. 362-68.

¹¹Robert E. Brown, Middle Class Democracy and the Revolution in Massachusetts, 1691-1780 (New York: Cornell University, 1955), pp. 261-62.

interest among these is an article appearing in the New England Quarterly for 1951 contributed by Oliver M. Dickerson titled "British Control of American Newspapers on the Eve of the Revolution."¹² It was of particular value in establishing Mein's relationships with British officials as revealed in his Memorials to the British seeking compensation for services performed in the struggle with the colonies.

The sources of information on early American newspapers concerning the problems faced by the colonial printer are many and varied. The most valuable of these was found to be the work of Lawrence C. Wroth, The Colonial Printer.¹³ This reference also contained information concerning the controversy over the establishment of the first printing type foundry in America, and the publication by Mein of John Dickinson's "The Liberty Song." For a comparison of Boston newspapers of the period the best source is Mary F. Ayer's article, "Checklist of Boston Newspapers, 1704-1780."¹⁴

¹²Oliver M. Dickerson, "British Control of American Newspapers on the Eve of the Revolution," New England Quarterly, XXIV (1951), pp. 453-468.

¹³Lawrence C. Wroth, The Colonial Printer (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1964), pp. 115-249.

¹⁴Mary F. Ayer, "Checklist of Boston Newspapers, 1704-1780," Colonial Society of Massachusetts Publications, IX, (1907) pp. 480-483. This is of primary value for bibliographical data.

A reference of great value is Charles S. Brigham's History and Bibliography of American Newspapers, 1690-1820,¹⁵ because it lists the location and completeness of every known file or collection of early American newspapers in existence. The Church Catalogue¹⁶ contains a facsimile of the title page of Mein's pamphlet, State of the Importations from Great Britain Into the Port of Boston From the Beginning of Jan. 1769, to Aug. 17th 1769, along with a collation of the work and a brief summary of Mein's activities. Church cites the locations of copies of this pamphlet. While the original copies are rare, the contents of the pamphlet were originally published in the Boston Chronicle and are easily obtained there. The pamphlet consists of cargo lists and manifests of all ships entering Boston harbor through the period of the non-importation agreement and names the masters and owners of each ship. It was the publication of this information that brought the wrath of Bostonian Whigs down upon Mein and drove him from the colonies.

Studies devoted exclusively to John Mein are very rare. John Eliot Alden was the only author found in this

¹⁵Clarence S. Brigham, History and Bibliography of American Newspapers, 1690-1820 (Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1947), I, pp. 276-277.

¹⁶Elihu W. Church, The Church Catalogue of Books Relating to the Discovery and Early History of North and South America, 5 volumes (New York: Peter Smith, 1951), V, pp. 2136-2137.

investigation, who devoted extensive effort toward uncovering the detail information about Mein. The results of his investigations were published in two articles, one in the Colonial Society of Massachusetts Publications in 1942, which pointed to Mein as the author of the Sagittarius' Letters.¹⁷ The other article, also published in 1942 by the Bibliographical Society, called attention to a number of important works published by Mein either not previously credited to American publishers or classified as of unknown origin.¹⁸ These studies are the most recent work available on Mein. Alden's investigation is an extension of earlier investigations by Andrews¹⁹ and Schlesinger²⁰ already mentioned.

A number of dictionaries were consulted for clarification of terms used in colonial newspapers. The most

¹⁷John E. Alden, "John Mein, Scourge of Patriots," The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, Publications, XXXIV (1937-1942), pp. 571-599.

¹⁸John E. Alden, "John Mein, Publisher: An Essay in Bibliographic Detection," Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America, XXXVI (1942, 3rd Quarter), pp. 192-214.

¹⁹Andrews, "The Boston Merchants and the Non-Importation Movement."

²⁰Schlesinger, The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, 1763-1776.

valuable source in this regard was Joseph Shipley's Dictionary of Early English.²¹

Bibliographical dictionaries and encyclopedias were helpful in establishing facts concerning Mein's associates. The Dictionary of National Biography²² was of particular use in reference to Englishmen of the period, while the Dictionary of American Biography²³ was of use to a lesser degree. Neither of these references contain any mention of Mein.

The division of the work into five chapters seems to be a logical method of organization. The first chapter, while introductory in nature, contains information pertinent to the purpose of the study, the sources used, the scope of the study, and the content and organization.

Chapter II covers Mein's activities, including an account of his background and early business ventures. It also includes a study of the establishment of the first circulating library in New England, and other activities during the first few years of his stay in America.

²¹Joseph Shipley, Dictionary of Early English (New York: Philosophical Library, 1955).

²²Sir Leslie Stephan and Sir Sidney Lee (eds.), The Dictionary of National Biography, 22 volumes (London: Oxford University Press, 1950).

²³Dumas Malone (ed.), Dictionary of American Biography (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953).

Chapter II stresses the importance of Mein as publisher and co-owner of the Boston Chronicle. It contains a description of the nature, aims, and design of the Chronicle and a discussion of its importance among Boston newspapers of the day. Mein's importance as a publisher of important works of the period, many for the first time in America, is noted.

Chapter III is concerned with Mein at the zenith of his American career. The purpose of this chapter is to show the choosing of sides over the non-importation agreement and the beginnings of Mein's alignment with the Loyalist position after his appointment as Royal Stationer by the Customs Board. It includes an account of his first encounter with the prevailing public opinion and arguments with local publishers.

Chapter IV includes the story of his role in the resistance to the non-importation agreement and the publication of information implicating local leaders in a "conspiracy" to defraud or at least a violation of the non-importation agreement. This chapter is extended to include the account of Mein's exit from the colonies, and his treatment at the hands of a Boston mob. Consideration is given here to his probable authorship of the Sagittarius' Letters, and Mein is presented as an effective propagandist for the Tory point of view.

The final chapter includes a summary of the study and a list of conclusions. Developments are restated and unanswered questions ranging beyond the scope of the study are suggested. Chronological organization was followed throughout as it seemed appropriate for the development of change in Mein's character during his stay in the colonies.

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CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND AND EARLY ACTIVITIES

Practically nothing is known of John Mein before his arrival in Boston in 1764. Isaiah Thomas recorded that he "was born in Scotland and there bred to the business of a bookseller . . . received a good education, was enterprising, and possessed handsome literary talents."¹ The earliest record of Mein found by John E. Alden² in his investigation showed his enrollment on December 3, 1760, as a burgess and a guildsman of Edinburgh in the right of his father, John Mein, Slater, Burgess and Guildsman.³ He is described as a bookseller at this time, as was his father John, who was the son of George Mein, "tenant in Essiltown, and had been enrolled in 1660 as an apprentice to Andrew Cassie, 'his majesty's mason.'"⁴ History records another Edinburgh bookseller named "James Mein" who worked in Edinburgh for a brief period of time, from 1684 to 1686. That this man was

¹Thomas, History of Printing in America, I, p. 152.

²Alden, "John Mein, Scourge of Patriots," p. 577.

³Charles B. Watson (ed.), Roll of Edinburgh Burgesses and Guild-Brethren, 1701-1760 (Edinburgh, 1930), p. 138.

⁴Charles B. Watson (ed.), Roll of Edinburgh Burgesses and Guild-Brethren, 1406-1700 (Edinburgh, 1929), p. 346.

a relative of John Mein who arrived in America eighty years later is pure conjecture.⁵

John Mein arrived in Boston on Thursday, October 15, 1764, aboard the ship George and James, Robert Montgomery master, seven weeks out of Glasgow.⁶ His arrival was not considered by the local press to be worthy of note. He was traveling in the company of Mr. Robert Sandeman, son-in-law and disciple of John Glas, religious dissenter of Scotland.⁷ The Glassites were a group of Scotch protestants who differed with the Established Church of Scotland. They asserted the independence of church and state, rejected the covenant, and practiced certain primitive Christian rites of literal obedience to what they interpreted as the commands of Christ.⁸ Sandeman was their promoter in the colonies.

Mein's connection with the Sandemanians is not known. He was probably concerned with them in matters pertaining

⁵Henry R. Plomer, A Dictionary of the Printers and Booksellers Who Were at Work in England, Scotland and Ireland from 1688 to 1725 (Oxford University Press, 1922), p. 203. A second volume published in 1933 covering the period 1726 to 1775 makes no mention of Mein.

⁶Item in The Massachusetts Gazette and Boston News-Letter, October 18, 1764.

⁷Thomas, History of Printing in America, I, p. 152.

⁸Williston Walker, "The Sandemans of New England," Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1901, Volume I (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1902), pp. 133-162.

to business, rather than as a religious devotee. The welcome the Sandemanian group received in Boston was somewhat less than warm. The following article appeared in The Massachusetts Gazette and Boston News-Letter a week after their arrival:

In Capt. Montgomery who arrived here last week from Scotland, Came Passenger the Reverend MR. SANDIMAN, said to be the author of the Letters of Rev. Mr. Hervey's Theron and Aspasio -- At the Request of several persons has twice discoursed in a public Manner at Masons Hall in this town; but we dont learn that any of his Auditors were either weak or wicked enough to become Proselytes to his Tenets. On Tuesday he left for Portsmouth.⁹

A church of the Sandemanian group was established in Boston in 1765, but the Revolutionary War proved to be too great a stress for them, and they had all but disappeared by 1777. They felt that obedience to the king was a Christian duty and the result was much hardship and sacrifice.¹⁰

While Mein shared to some degree their political views, it is doubtful that he shared their religious convictions. Mein's tormentors during his unpopular stand in opposition to non-importation seldom used his religion, or lack of it, to denounce him. The only mention of Mein's religion in any of the verbal attacks he was subjected to

⁹Item in The Massachusetts Gazette and Boston News-Letter, October 25, 1764.

¹⁰Walker, "The Sandemans of New England," pp. 153-156. See also, Malone, Dictionary of American Biography, III, p. 329.

was made later in the London Public Ledger, July 11, 1769, by an unknown writer who signed his letters, "Minos." He gave the following account of Mein's religious convictions as a part of a much longer diatribe assessing Mein's character:

. . . Forgetting his origin, his obligations, and himself, he became not only prodigal, conceited, arrogant, lazy, and profligate, but in the progress of his infatuation, sat himself up as a free-thinker, and, assisted by the Doctrinaire Philosophique, &c., openly ridiculed the Christian religion.¹¹

Even this scathing account of his character did not dwell at length upon his religious deficiencies.

The exact extent of Mein's involvement with the Sandeman family in their religious ventures will probably never be known, but his business relationships with them are well documented. Isaiah Thomas noted that:

. . . He had arrived . . . in November, 1764, in company with Mr. Robert Sandeman, a kinsman of Mr. Sandeman of the same Christian name who for a short time was the partner of Mein. . . . They continued the company only a few months.¹²

Thomas' information regarding Mein's arrival date has since been more accurately determined. There remains some

¹¹Alden, "John Mein, Scourge of Patriots," pp. 572-574. "Minos" was responsible for identifying Mein as the author of Sagittarius's Letters and Political Speculations, and Mr. Alden has included the text of this letter in his article by way of introducing the colorful character of Mein.

¹²Thomas, History of Printing in America, I, pp. 152-153.

question as to which member of the Sandeman family Mein's partner was. Sandeman's nephew, Robert or "Bob," son of his brother William, was in America with the group at the time. Walker's investigation of the Sandemans in America shows that on February 28, 1770, a Connecticut blacksmith named Asa Church was fined \$40 in court for keeping Robert Sandeman and his nephew "Bob" in his house for a fortnight. Bob's age is given as fourteen.¹³ It is therefore unlikely that this is the nephew who became Mein's partner in 1764, as he would have been but nine years of age. Alden's information gained from a study of the Sandeman genealogy leads him to conclude that Mein's partner was another nephew, George, who was in America also and was nine years older than his brother.¹⁴

The business was established on November 19, 1764.¹⁵ The following advertisement appeared on the first page of

¹³Walker, "The Sandemans of New England," footnote to p. 154 quoting from a letter Robert Sandeman wrote to his brother William, March 27, 1770.

¹⁴J. G. Sandeman, The Sandeman Genealogy (Edinburgh, 1859), pp. 15, 21, as quoted in Alden, "John Mein, Scourge of Patriots," p. 576.

¹⁵Boston Gazette, November 19, 1764, as quoted in Alden, "John Mein, Scourge of Patriots," p. 578, announcing a shop conducted by Mein and Sandeman where "might be purchased books and pamphlets, including those by Robert Sandeman, as well as Irish linens and excellent bottl'd Bristol beer nearly two years old."

The Massachusetts Gazette and Boston News-Letter, Friday,
November 30, 1764;¹⁶

MEIN & SANDEMAN

Have just imported from Great Britain the following
articles which are to be Sold very cheap for CASH,
At their shop nearly opposite to Broomfield's Lane,
Marlboro' - Street, Boston

Sandemans Letters on Theron and Aspasia

2 vols. 9f. 4d.

Several Pamphlets by the same author

Glas's works 4v fl 12s.

A good assortment of Irish Linen

Checks / Check Handkerchiefs

Coarse Oznaburg Thread

Excellent Bottled Beer 2 years old

an Assortment of Plays

Mein remained in business with Sandeman at this
address until sometime between April and June of 1765.¹⁷

The exact reason for the discontinuance of the partnership
is not known. After June of 1765 Sandeman's name disappears
from the advertisements as does the listings of linen cloth.¹⁸

Robert Sandeman had been a linen manufacturer in partnership
with his brother William from 1736 to 1744 when he became
a Glassite minister.¹⁹ Linen was the obvious interest the
Sandemanians had in the shop, aside from a possible outlet

¹⁶Advertisement in The Massachusetts Gazette and Boston News-Letter, November 30, 1764. The advertisement is not quoted here in its entirety.

¹⁷Alden, "John Mein, Scourge of Patriots," p. 579.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Malone, Dictionary of American Biography, III, p. 329.

for their religious materials. Letters written by George Sandeman show he was a person "of volatile and uncertain temperament, a problem to his elders."²⁰ A temperament such as Mein seemed to possess would indicate that a partnership of this nature was doomed to failure.

Before Mein arrived in Boston the chief bookstore had been the London Book Store in King Street. James Rivington, as sole owner, had opened the store on February 8, 1762.²¹ At some date between April 26 and July 19, 1762, Rivington entered into a partnership with William Miller of Boston. Miller apparently operated the store until his death on October 31, 1765.²² Rivington was then living in New York, and either because of Miller's illness or financial difficulties, he gave up the Boston branch of his business, and Mein purchased it in October of 1765, retaining its name.²³ Mein's goods were advertised "to be sold at the LONDON BOOK STORE (lately improved by Messers Rivington and Miller) the

²⁰ Alden, "John Mein, Scourge of Patriots," p. 579.

²¹ Advertisement in the Boston Gazette, February 8, 1762.

²² Boston Evening-Post, November 4, 1765, quoted by Alden, "John Mein, Scourge of Patriots," p. 579.

²³ Boston Gazette, October 7, 1765, as quoted in Alden, "John Mein, Scourge of Patriots," p. 579, and in Charles K. Bolton, "Circulating Libraries in Boston, 1765-1865," The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, Publications, XI (1906-1907), pp. 196-200.

second Door above the British Coffee-House, North Side of King Street."²⁴

That same month Mein opened the first circulating library in Boston, and the first of its kind in New England. The idea was not original with Mein. It had occurred as early as 1674 to Francis Kirkman, a London bookseller, to circulate a part of his collection of books.²⁵ It is not known how many other towns had established circulating libraries by that time. An advertisement appearing in the New York Gazette for September 5, 1705, notified "The subscribers to NOEL'S circulating library . . . that there is an Addition made of several new Books."²⁶ Benjamin Franklin is usually credited with the establishment of the first circulating library in America when in 1731 he established the Library Company.

In 1765 Mein advertised the publication of a Catalogue of his twelve hundred books. A copy of this catalogue is now in the Library of the Massachusetts Historical Society. It is the only known copy in existence. The title describes the library:

²⁴Ibid., pp. 196-200.

²⁵Ibid., p. 196.

²⁶Ibid., p. 197 footnote.

A / CATALOGUE / OF / MEIN'S / CIRCULATING LIBRARY:/
 CONSISTING / OF above Twelve Hundred Volumes, in most /
 Branches of polite Literature, Arts and Sciences; /
 . . . / Which are LENT to Read, / at One Pound Eight
 Shillings, lawful Money, per year; Eighteen / Shillings
per half year; or, Ten and Eight Pence per Quarter;/
 By JOHN MEIN, Bookseller, / At the LONDON BOOK-STORE /
 Second Door above the BRITISH COFFEE-HOUSE, / North
 side of KING STREET, BOSTON -- / . . . / BOSTON:
 Printed in the Year MDCCLXV. / Price, One Shilling
 lawful Money.²⁷

Subscribers were advised to send in six or eight numbers from the catalogue to avoid being disappointed. Those living in the country might pay a double subscription and take two books at a time. An attendant was present from 10:00 to 1:00 and from 3:00 to 6:00 daily.

Mein did not indicate who his supplier was, and he stated only that a number of gentlemen had encouraged the venture, which "tho' fraught with amusement has been hitherto unattempted in New England." It would "amuse the man of leisure" and "insinuate knowledge and instruction under the veil of entertainment to the fair sex."²⁸ Mein was known

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid., p. 198.

to have had a business relationship with Alexander Kincaid, a Scottish publisher, who had purchased a lending library from the poet Allan Ramsay in Edinburgh. It was begun in 1725 and was the forerunner of all British circulating libraries.²⁹ Isaiah Thomas states that Mein was connected with a bookseller in Scotland, by whom he was supplied with books.³⁰ Alden provides further evidence in a letter dated Edinburgh, September 4, 1783, and written by the attorney for the Kincaid estate in which reference is made to Mein's indebtedness to the estate of this Kincaid who had died in 1777.³¹

With the publication of the Catalogue, Mein entered upon yet another phase of his short career in Massachusetts Bay colony; that of publisher. He was not a printer and had to turn to someone else for the actual work of printing. He spoke of himself in his petition to the judges of King's Bench in London in 1770 as "a bookseller and printer in Boston." He was, nevertheless, a publisher rather than a printer in the present-day sense of these terms.³²

²⁹Alden, "John Mein, Publisher," pp. 199-214. See note on p. 200.

³⁰Thomas, History of Printing, I, p. 153.

³¹Alden, "John Mein, Publisher," p. 200, footnote 4.

³²Ibid., p. 201.

A fellow Scotsman living in Boston, William M'Alpine, evidently printed the Catalogue and other works published by Mein before 1767. While William M'Alpine's name does not appear on any of the books Mein published during 1765 and 1766, he left his mark in another way. To meet an emergency he hit upon the clever idea of using an inverted "q" for a "b." His types were obtained in Scotland from a foundry in Glasgow and took months to acquire, so he used the less needed "q's" by setting them upside down as "b's." Alden assures us that "the only noticeable difference is that the serif of the ascending stroke extends across the ascender instead of being in the form of a hook."³³

Connected with M'Alpine in the printing business at this time was John Fleeming, still another Scotsman. Their names appeared jointly on the title pages of a number of books that were printed in 1765 and 1766.³⁴ John Fleeming "had been brought up to printing in Scotland,"³⁵ and had arrived in Boston on August 20, 1764, nearly two months before Mein and the Sandemans' arrival.³⁶ Fleeming became associated with William M'Alpine at once. It is quite

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid., p. 201.

³⁵Thomas, History of Printing, I, p. 151.

³⁶Alden, "John Mein, Scourge of Patriots," p. 580.

possible that Fleeming's migration bore some relationship to the coming of Robert Sandeman. Alden calls attention to the possible connection between the two by pointing out that William M'Alpine's mother-in-law was named Elizabeth Glass, a fact which suggests a relationship to John Glas, Sandeman's father-in-law. In addition to this suggestion, Alden also noted that the firm of M'Alpine and Fleeming promptly published Sandeman's Some Thoughts on Christianity (Boston, 1765), the earliest of the preacher's works to appear in America.³⁷

Mein apparently convinced Fleeming that forming a partnership would be to the mutual advantage of both. Isaiah Thomas states that Fleeming then "made a voyage to Scotland, there purchased printing materials for the firm, hired three or four journeymen printers, and accompanied by them returned to Boston."³⁸ Fleeming returned on October 31, 1766, on the snow Jenny, Archibald Orr, master from Glasgow.³⁹

Little is known of John Fleeming aside from his association with John Mein in the printing business. In

³⁷Ibid. Alden uses information from the Boston Records Commissioners' Reports, XXIX, 286, to establish the dates of the arrival in Boston of John Fleeming. He also makes reference to Edward A. Jones, The Loyalists of Massachusetts (London, 1930), pp. 206-207, in reference to Elizabeth Glass.

³⁸Thomas, History of Printing, I, p. 151.

³⁹Alden, "John Mein, Scourge of Patriots," p. 580.

his memorial to Lord North, November 12, 1773, requesting compensation for his losses at the hands of unfriendly Bostonians, he indicated that he was a family man, "with a wife and several Children."⁴⁰ It is known that on August 8, 1770, he married the sister of Dr. Benjamin Church, and in 1775 acted as an intermediary in Church's treasonable correspondence with British authorities.⁴¹

Upon Fleeming's return from England the firm of Mein and Fleeming began their earliest publishing ventures. Their first shop was located in a printing house in Wings Lane.⁴² The press was put into operation on October 31, 1766.⁴³ They were beset by all the possible misfortunes that the early American printer might count upon as risks of his trade, such as paper shortages, small supplies of tools, labor difficulties, bad weather, inadequate supplies of ink, and most troublesome of all, the shortage of type. To help overcome the type shortage, Mein and Fleeming employed David Mitchelson who engaged himself in

⁴⁰Dickerson, "British Control of American Newspapers on the Eve of the Revolution," pp. 453-468. See especially p. 464.

⁴¹Schlesinger, Prelude to Independence, The Newspaper War on Great Britain, 1763-1776, pp. 103-108. See note 66.

⁴²Thomas, History of Printing, I, p. 151.

⁴³Alden, "John Mein, Publisher," p. 202.

type-casting research. Mr. Abel Buell of Killingworth disputes Mitchelson's claim that he cast the anachronistic "modern" face that appeared after 1766 in the publications of the Mein and Fleeming firm. A newspaper paragraph from an article on American industries contained the information that "Printing types are . . . made by Mr. Mitchelson of this Town (Boston), equal to any imported from Great-Britain; and might by proper Encouragement soon be able to furnish all the Printers in America at the same Price they are sold in England."⁴⁴ Extensive investigation into this matter by Lawrence C. Wroth indicates that it is likely that Mein and Fleeming purchased their type from a British source. In any event, the product of their presses was superior to the work being done in other colonial American print shops.

It is possible to picture their new printing shop on Newbury Street from an inventory of it taken in 1770 by Joseph Otis in connection with a suit brought against Mein by John Hancock on behalf of Thomas Longman, to whom Mein was heavily in debt. The inventory reads as follows:

Seven Frames on which are Sixty five Cases with the
Types etc.
Two Printing Presses with all the Materials thereto
One Large Iron Stove
One composing Stone and Sundry Small articles
Namely Water-troughs, Two wooden banks, a
high trough

⁴⁴Massachusetts Gazette, September 7, 1769, as quoted in Wroth, The Colonial Printer, p. 102.

Below Stairs

One Iron Stove, two cutting presses, one grind Stone
Two Stoles with a number of small articles in the Said
Room.⁴⁵

Most of the work done by Mein before his flight to
England was done in this shop. Isaiah Thomas remarks regard-
ing the books which Mein had published that of them,

some of these books had a false imprint, and were
palmed upon the public for London editions, because
Mein apprehended that books printed in London, however
executed, sold better than those which were printed in
America; and, at that time, many purchasers sanctioned
his opinion.⁴⁶

John Alden has carefully examined this phase of Mein's
career. Challenged by Thomas' suggestion that not all the
books for which Mein is said to be responsible are readily
identifiable as such, Alden re-examined the lists of books
Mein is recorded as having issued. He discovered that
Mein's political and journalistic campaign against non-
importation in 1769 became significant in his role as
publisher. While he denounced the agreements and the fail-
ure of the local merchants to live up to the letter of their
promises, he managed to capitalize upon local distaste for
British merchandise. Seeing that the Bostonians were ready
to prove their patriotism by purchasing American goods, he
switched from his practice of palming London imprints on his

⁴⁵Alden, "John Mein, Publisher," p. 203.

⁴⁶Thomas, History of Printing, I, p. 151.

own works, and began to advertize lists of books under the caption "Printed in America, and to be sold by John Mein" as early as October 2, 1769.⁴⁷

It is impossible to say what was the earliest work issued by Mein and Fleeming. Alden's investigations found that there were a number of important books published by Mein and Fleeming not heretofore ascribed to them. His evidence indicates the earliest work to be an edition of Four Dissertations on the Reciprocal Advantages of a Perpetual Union between Great Britain and her American Colonies which Mein advertised in the Boston Gazette of January 12, 1767. Whether it ever was actually published by them will probably never be known as no copy has survived. The oldest existing works published by their shop was their Massachusetts Register for 1767 and an edition of James Fordyce's Sermons to Young Women. A letter from Mein to Ezra Stiles, June 18, 1767, dates the work on the Massachusetts Register as being "January last."⁴⁸

Between the years 1766 and 1769 John Mein was responsible for producing forty-two publications. A few of these titles were printed by M'Alpine in the early months of 1766, but the bulk of the work was done by the firm of Mein and

⁴⁷Alden, "John Mein, Publisher," p. 204.

⁴⁸Alden, "John Mein, Scourge of Patriots," p. 580.

Fleeming. Perhaps the most notable of all Mein's publications from a literary standpoint was the first American edition of Oliver Goldsmith's Vicar of Wakefield.⁴⁹ The temper of the times prompted the publication of a number of political writings. These were of the earliest works including Daniel Dulany's Considerations on the Propriety of Imposing Taxes in the British Colonies, for the Purpose of raising a Revenue, by Act of Parliament. Another pro-American pamphlet, Sermons to Asses, was written anonymously by James Murray of Newcastle, but was attributed to Franklin by the publisher either to increase circulation or because of a sincere belief that Franklin was the author. He published John Dickinson's Liberty Song, "one of the earliest strictly native secular poems to appear in print with musical notation."⁵⁰ Dickinson's "Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania to the Inhabitants of the British Colonies" were published in the Boston Chronicle beginning in the issue for December 28, 1767. All manner of works were published by Mein and Fleeming in addition to the political and poetic publications mentioned above. Mein's advertisements in the pages of his newspaper include excerpts from almanacs, dictionaries, medical books, and comedy writings.

⁴⁹Alden, "John Mein, Publisher," pp. 209-210.

⁵⁰Wroth, The Colonial Printer, p. 249.

As a natural outgrowth of their printing activities Mein and Fleeming began publishing a newspaper, the Boston Chronicle. They issued a prospectus for this venture on October 22, 1767, and began publishing the newspaper on December 21, 1767. It "quickly showed itself to be the most enterprising sheet on the continent in content as well as typographical appearance."⁵¹ It was the first newspaper in America to be published regularly twice a week.⁵² Isaiah Thomas records that "it was printed on demy (about 16 x 21 inches), in quarto (four sheets, eight pages), imitating, in its form, The London Chronicle."⁵³

The Boston Chronicle was unlike any other colonial newspaper, having been paged consecutively and having been bound in volumes. This accounts for the excellent files available.⁵⁴ Although each volume had a title page and an

⁵¹Schlesinger, The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, 1763-1776, p. 160.

⁵²Ayer, "Checklist of Boston Newspapers, 1704-1780," p. 480. The author notes that the Boston News-Letter was published twice a week during a portion of the years 1770 and 1771; but those were sporadic issues.

⁵³Thomas, History of Printing, I, p. 151.

⁵⁴Brigham, History and Bibliography of American Newspapers, 1690-1820, I, pp. 276-277. This reference lists the location and completeness of every file or collection in existence.

index was planned, only Volume I was ever actually indexed. The index for Volume I, which filled nearly six pages of five columns each, represented an extensive task. Volume I contained the issues from 21 December, 1767, to 26 December, 1768; Volume II, the issues from 2 January to 28 December, 1769; and Volume III, the issues from 1 January, 1770, to 25 June, 1770, at which time the publication was discontinued.⁵⁵ All three volumes, containing over eleven hundred pages, represent an account of colonial history from the Tory point of view.

Mein and Fleeming had competition in Boston from The Boston Gazette and Country Journal, published by John Gill and Benjamin Edes, a Whig organ, and the Massachusetts Gazette, the Boston Evening-Post, and the Boston News-Letter. In the non-importation struggle the Boston Gazette was Mein's most formidable enemy. That Mein prospered in the face of considerable competition is evidenced by the fact that a year after he started the publication of the Chronicle the company moved their printing materials to a new shop on Newbury street.⁵⁶ On April 5, 1768, Mein was appointed as a supplier of "stationery" to the American Board of Customs Commissioners. The Commission had the largest and most

⁵⁵Ayer, "Checklist of Boston Newspapers," p. 160.

⁵⁶Thomas, History of Printing, I, p. 151.

lucrative printing contract to award in America.⁵⁷ In Mein's own words his paper had a subscription list of fourteen hundred, and he further claimed that in 1769 he used four thousand sheets of paper for the issues of the Chronicle that were circulated outside of Massachusetts.⁵⁸ Printed in folio size, as they were after January 2, 1769, this meant more copies were circulated outside of Massachusetts than at home. Granted that Mein was given to exaggeration, particularly in a Memorial requesting remuneration for his services in the non-importation movement, the fact remains that his newspaper enjoyed wide circulation both in Massachusetts and elsewhere.

⁵⁷Dickerson, "British Control of American Newspapers on the Eve of the Revolution," p. 455.

⁵⁸Ibid. See also Andrews, "The Boston Merchants and the Non-Importation Movement," p. 227.

CHAPTER III

THE CHOOSING OF SIDES

The firm of Mein and Fleeming embarked upon their short but stormy career as publishers and printers of the Boston Chronicle at a time when American newspapers were assuming a new role in colonial society. Prior to 1765 newspapers were relatively unimportant as agencies for moulding or reporting public opinion. They contained legal notices, ads, and borrowed pieces from London papers and elsewhere, but contained little or no editorializing as we understand the term today.¹ The printer's journalistic influence was not exercised openly through the expression of editorial opinion, but through the suppression of news and the closing of his columns to the political articles of the opposition or in his refusal to print pamphlets or broadsides not friendly to the cause he favored. This gave the printer a potentiality of power and influence in the community not shared by other craftsmen of his social class.² Propagandists made extensive use of the printers' trade in the form of handbills, printed sermons, books, pamphlets,

¹Dickerson, "British Control of American Newspapers on the Eve of the Revolution," p. 453.

²Wroth, The Colonial Printer, pp. 189-190.

and broadsides, but little editorializing was done in local papers.

In the provinces where there was only one newspaper, the printer printed the notices for all branches of government. In older provinces such as Massachusetts, political cleavages had developed between the Governor and the representatives of the popularly elected Assembly. One newspaper usually contracted for the Governor and his Council and another for the people's Assembly. Every royal Governor had one paper to serve as his mouthpiece.³

The Townshend Acts injected a new factor into American newspaper relations. The laws had been passed by Parliament but had to be administered in the colonies. The administration of these laws required new methods and means. The Commissioners began to supply a chain of newspapers under the control of royal governors with a common line of policy.⁴ The printing contract was at first considered to be a part of political patronage and accepted as a matter of course in Boston politics. As events developed it became

³Dickerson, "British Control of American Newspapers on the Eve of the Revolution," pp. 453-455.

⁴Ibid. See also Clyde A. Duniway, The Development of Freedom of the Press in Massachusetts, Harvard Historical Studies, Volume 12 (New York: Longmans Green, 1906). For a more modern treatment of censorship in Boston see Ralph E. McCoy, "Banned in Boston: The Development of Literary Censorship in Massachusetts" (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Illinois, Graduate College, 1956).

an important outlet for pro-British propaganda.

The printing contract was generally quite profitable and sought after by printers of the time. After 1765 the award of the title "official publication" did not always mean success. In Boston the firm of John Green and Joseph Russell, publishers of the Boston Post-Boy and Advertiser had been given the contract for the newly arrived Board of Commissioners. Green and Russell fared none too well with the new contract as their Memorial to the Customs Commissioners in April of 1772 indicates:

That your Memorialists soon after the arrival of this Honorable Board in Boston had the honor to be appointed His Majesty's Printers to the same, . . . before your Honor's arrival, many Disorders and Tumults were committed and numbers of inflammatory pieces appeared in several of the public News Papers in this and the Neighboring provinces, tending, as they thought, to subvert all Order and good Government, particularly by what was called the Farmers Letters. . . . Your Memorialists . . . applied to your Honors for direction concerning the same, as numbers of people were extremely pressing and even threatening them, if they did not publish them . . . your Honors declined taking notice of it as a Board, but were pleased to advise us as private gentlemen by no means to print the same -- we did not and soon lost the largest part of the Subscribers of those who then took our Newspaper. . . . That as it was the pleasure of the Board to appoint Mr. Main Stationer and as we were appointed Printers, . . . They can also say that they have not done twenty pounds Sterling worth of work at the printing trade any one year since your Honors appointed them your Printers.⁵

⁵Dickerson, "British Control of American Newspapers on the Eve of the Revolution," pp. 455-459. He copied the records of the Commission in the Treasury Papers and cites his source as: Letter of Commissioners of Customs in Boston to the Treasury, April 2, 1772, Treasury I: Bundle 492, Public Record Office, London.

Richard Draper, publisher of the Boston Post-Boy and News-Letter had the printing contract for Governor Bernard and the Council. Even with broad coverage provided by two newspapers devoted to the Tory cause, it was not a popular position to defend. Green and Russell complained of the loss of many subscribers. News did not favor the forces in power. There were a number of reasons for the loss of popularity suffered by the Loyalists. The presence of the Commissioners in Boston irritated many Bostonians. The actions against Hancock, the seizure of the Liberty, the bringing of troops into Boston, and the initiation of law suits against prominent citizens of the town did little to win adherents to the Tory point of view.

In such an atmosphere, a hot-tempered newspaper publisher with a strong leaning toward the Tory point of view was not long in finding himself at odds with local Whig sympathizers. Mein's first three issues of the Boston Chronicle had barely been published when an unknown writer using the name "Americus" took issue with him over an article he had reprinted from the London press critical of William Pitt. The Boston Gazette of January 18, 1768, contained a letter to the publishers, Edes and Gill, from "Americus" in Salem dated January 7, 1768, strongly supporting Pitt. He questioned Mein's integrity, purpose, and politics. He also reminded him of his earlier promise that

"whenever any Dispute claims general Attention, the arguments on both sides shall be laid before the Publick with utmost Impartiality."⁶ Mein later credited this piece of writing to the younger James Otis. In any event it was an open attack on Mein's editorship and politics. The fourth issue of the Boston Chronicle came out on January 7, 1768, accompanied by "an extra edition printed to satisfy the curiosity of subscribers as to the particular account of the death of his Royal Highness the Duke of York." The issue regularly published for January 7, 1768, may have been in the hands of Otis in time for him to reply the same date, but it is unlikely.

Mein may have been trying to stick to his original promise of publishing both sides of any argument with impartiality. He had promised at least one of the Farmer's Letters in each issue of his Chronicle.⁷ He had advertised for sale, Considerations on the propriety of Imposing Taxes on the British Colonies for the Purpose of raising revenue by acts of Parliament, written by "one of the most celebrated citizens on this continent," later known to be Daniel

⁶Alden, "John Mein, Scourge of Patriots," pp. 582-583.

⁷The Boston Chronicle, Monday, December 21, 1767, has letter I; issue number 2, December 21-28, 1767, has letter II; issue number 3, December 28 to January 4, 1768, has letters III and IV; issue number 4 has no Farmer's Letter, but the series continues with number 5, January 11-18, 1768.

Dulaney.⁸ On the other side of the argument Mein gave considerable space to Townshend's frequent and reckless speeches before Parliament stressing the opinion that the colonists had forfeited their rights and privileges under the charters by their acts of violence, and that they could no longer be trusted to behave. These usually appeared under the head "News from Great Britain." Townshend had accused one of Massachusetts' agents, Elijah Cooke, of breaking every article of the Massachusetts charter over and over.⁹

Whatever objections "Americus" may have had to Mein's editorship may never be known. Mein's reaction to his letter is well documented. Mein felt the need of defending his character against attacks such as this, and on the afternoon of the same day, January 7, he paid a visit to the publishers of the Boston Gazette or Country Journal, Benjamin Edes and John Gill. Edes is described by Isaiah Thomas as "a warm and a firm patriot" and Gill as "an honest Whig."¹⁰ Their newspaper was the official organ of the popular assembly in Massachusetts. Thomas assures us that "no paper on the continent took a more active part in

⁸The Boston Chronicle, Thursday, January 7, 1768, p. 40.

⁹Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁰Thomas, History of Printing in America, I, p. 136.

defence of the country, or more ably supported its rights, than the Boston Gazette."¹¹ Both publishers were harassed by the British during the Revolutionary War; Gill was taken prisoner and Edes narrowly escaped to Watertown where he continued publication during the war years. Their politics were well established.

The results of Mein's visit cleared up any doubts the Bostonians may have had as to his politics. Perhaps the best source of information regarding what happened that afternoon is taken from Benjamin Edes' articles in the Boston Gazette of January 25, 1768. Edes stated that Mein came to his office between four and five o'clock, Monday afternoon, January 7, and demanded that he be given the name of the person who wrote the article against him. When Edes refused to do so, Mein is quoted as having said, "I shall look upon you as the author, and the affair shall be decided in three minutes."¹² Edes questioned Mein as to his meaning and suggested that if Mein's character had been injured, he might seek the law for compensation. Edes further suggested that Mein return the following morning at nine o'clock. Mein did so and Edes again refused to divulge the name of

¹¹Ibid., II, p. 54.

¹²Boston Gazette, January 25, 1768, as quoted in Alden, "John Mein, Scourge of Patriots," pp. 583-584.

the author. Mein then challenged Edes to take his hat and step outside to there settle the issue. He refused and Mein left the printing shop with the threat "to settle the affair in three minutes" hanging in the air.

Mein later blamed the younger James Otis for this piece as to the encounter in Edes' office. Mein stated that "on their refusal to name the authors [I] ask[ed] them one after another to take a short walk; and on their declining it to cane the first of them I mett."¹³ On January 26, 1768, Mein met John Gill on the street, where "the peppery Scott brutally clubbed Gill" on the back of the head.¹⁴ John E. Alden pictures this encounter from the court files containing Mein's summons served upon him as a consequence of this attack:

John Mein at . . . Boston on the twenty sixth day of January last in the evening . . . with force & arms, to wit, with a large club made an assault upon . . . John Gill and then and there gave the said John Gill two violent blows . . . upon the back part of the head of the said John Gill and beat, wounded and evil intreated the said John Gill so grievously a manner that his life was dispaired of and other enormities the said John Mein did committ upon the said John Gill against the peace of our Lord the King.¹⁵

¹³Ibid. See also Sparks MSS., Harvard College Library, Papers relating to New England, III, 46.

¹⁴Schlesinger, Prelude to Independence, The Newspaper War on Britain, 1763-1776, p. 104.

¹⁵Alden, "John Mein, Scourge of Patriots," p. 585; see also the Boston Gazette, February 1, 1768.

On February 1, 1768, Samuel Adams jumped into the fray under the pseudonym of "Populus," appearing in print in the Boston Gazette with the view that the affair was in no sense a private one, but a "Spaniard-like Attempt" on the freedom of the press. He stated that Mein's actions toward Gill were "inexcusable" in the light of the generous treatment he had received from the public.¹⁶ Adams further charged that Mein's papers had been "Poor and uninteresting," and indicated that Mein had violated the public trust, asking "what he thinks will be the just Reward of his own Presumption?"

The Board of Customs Commissioners was aware of the growing dissension and the alignment of political factions stemming from Mein's choice of borrowed articles for his newspaper, and saw in this an opportunity to win over a valuable adherent to their cause. On April 5, 1768, they put the firm of Mein and Fleeming on their payroll as a supplier of stationery, and a year and a half later made them the sole suppliers.¹⁷ The Board did less to create a situation than they did to exploit one that already existed.

¹⁶Boston Records Commissioner's Reports, XVI, 164, as quoted in Alden, "John Mein, Scourge of Patriots," p. 585, show that Mein was chosen Constable at a town meeting on March 20, 1766. There is no other evidence of "generous Treatment" Mein may have received from the people of Boston.

¹⁷Schlesinger, Prelude to Independence, The Newspaper War on Britain, 1773-1776, p. 105.

Whatever Mein's political convictions may have been prior to April 5, his newspaper now became a paid government newspaper.

Mein's case was argued in the courts on April 19, 1768. James Otis served as attorney for Gill and Robert Auchmuty represented Mein. Auchmuty was to become a Loyalist refugee and was probably associated with the Tory element in Boston at the time of the trial. This further illustrates the alignment along party lines of the participants in the case. Mein testified before the court in defense of his unfavorable article on Pitt that he thought it "odd that Edes and Gill should desire him to be of no Party. Pitt is a fallen Angell, and given up by his Partizons, since he dwindled into a Lord." Auchmuty emphasized the insults cast upon Mein by the article "Americus" had written and those aspersions cast upon his character by "Populus" in a later issue. He was accused of being a "Jacobite" and the phrase "liberty of the press" was used frequently by Otis. Otis asserted that Gill was "assulted for carrying on a Paper in the Course of his Business." The court found Mein guilty and fined him \$130. Both Mein and Gill appealed the case to Superior Court of Judicature, which upset the ruling of the lower court

and reduced Mein's fine to £75.¹⁸

Mein and Fleeming avoided violent trouble for the remainder of the year and continued to publish the Boston Chronicle as well as other works. Their newspaper contained lively accounts of Governor Bernard's difficulties with the House of Representatives. Most of the letters which were published were those involved in the exchange of ideas between these opposing forces in Boston politics. There seems to have been an attempt on the part of Mein to maintain a balance of sorts between the Whig and Tory viewpoints. All of the Farmer's Letters were published, as was Dickinson's "Liberty Song" along with frequent pieces favorable to the colonists' point of view. The publishers managed to refrain from any damaging attacks upon the character of any person for a considerable length of time considering the nature of the times. They gave space to problems faced by fellow Americans in other provinces; to problems faced by farmers by encouraging experimentation with new crops and new methods of farming, varying from ways of treating wheat smut to wine recipes and methods of raising flax and grapes. Unusual occurrences and bits of wit and humor sparked nearly every issue. Much attention

¹⁸Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts, Early Court Files, Case 89428, as quoted in Alden, "John Mein, Scourge of Patriots," p. 586.

was given to politics "back home" in England, including the Wilkes affair in London and the Coal-heavers' strike in Wales. Poems and essays appeared often, usually from some publication they were working on at the time. Advertisements were limited in number. Mein had promised no more than two pages of ads in any issue. The ad for his bookstore often ran a full page in length. He had few regular advertisers, but the Chronicle boasted a circulation of 1500.

On November 14, 1768, Mein and Fleeming issued their proposal for amendments in the format and content of the Boston Chronicle. They planned to enlarge the paper to "one-half more . . . the first Monday of January, 1768." They promised more book reviews and more articles giving accounts of religious disputes. A map, "an elegant copper plate one the size of a folio page . . . gratis," was promised yearly. Events of the following year prevented the realization of the promise that they "will never print a piece that may injure the Characters of individuals." The plans for next year's publication continued with an expression of thanks to the public for their support and the notice that an index and title page would be prepared for the first volume and delivered to the subscribers "against the end of the year."¹⁹

¹⁹Boston Chronicle, November 14, 1768.

CHAPTER IV

THE NON-IMPORTATION DISPUTE

To understand John Mein's problems with the merchants of Boston it is necessary to trace briefly the background of the non-importation movement in Massachusetts. The Boston merchants had been loosely organized since about 1750 when they began to meet in the front room of the British Coffee House to consider questions of trade. In 1763 when fear that the Molasses Act of 1733, due to expire the next year, would be renewed, they promptly formed a trade society. They called their organization "The Society for Encouraging Trade and Commerce within the Province of Massachusetts Bay." The organization included "The Body," or the entire membership, sometimes called "Whole Body" or "The Trade"; and a standing committee composed of 15 members. The Body met in the spring of each year and the standing committee met monthly. James Otis and John Hancock were prominent members of the standing committee. The merchants' society was the forerunner of the Chamber of Commerce.¹

The first act of the newly-formed merchants' society was to draft a "Statement of the Trade and Fisheries of

¹Andrews, "The Boston Merchants and the Non-Importation Movement," pp. 161-164.

Massachusetts" which was published as a brochure by a group representing the distilling interests and was aimed at persuading Parliament not to extend the Molasses Act.² They drew up petitions and memorials and presented them to their agents in England and encouraged merchants in other colonies to do likewise. The memorials from Massachusetts, as well as those from New York and Rhode Island, did not arrive in time to have any effect on Grenville. On March 9, 1764, he introduced in Parliament his resolutions for revision and continuation of the molasses duty. On April 5, 1764, Parliament passed the Sugar Act. The first endeavor of the newly-formed society had ended in failure. The Act had reduced the duty on molasses from 6d. to 3d. a gallon. While this seems a considerable reduction, the colonists had been led by rumor to expect the figure would be 1d. or 2d., which was as much as the trade could have borne. Violations of the old Acts of Trade had been general throughout the colonies, especially in the case of molasses. Enforcement of these laws at even one-half their former level meant economic ruin to colonial merchants. Other avenues of trade such as lumbering and wine making whereby the merchants might have been able to recover from the ruin of the molasses business were

²Lawrence H. Gipson, The Coming of the Revolution, 1763-1775 (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 64.

were blocked. Smuggling risks were too great.³ From 1764 to 1768 the merchants' society directed its efforts toward convincing English authorities that the revenue acts were harmful to both sides.⁴

The idea of non-importation of goods from England as a means of retaliation against acts of Parliament first took place in October of 1765 among the New York merchants, who agreed to a series of resolutions constituting the first non-importation agreement in America.⁵ Their actions were taken in protest against the Grenville taxation program in general, and the recently enacted Stamp Act in particular. In an attempt to get the Stamp Act repealed, the New York merchants resolved not to ship goods to England and to countermand existing orders for goods until May 1, 1766. Elsewhere protests against the Stamp Act had already taken form. Patrick Henry had offered his resolutions to the House of Burgesses in May of 1765, and The Sons of Liberty had led riots against the stamp distributors in Massachusetts and other colonies. In October the Stamp Act Congress brought

³Edmund S. and Helen M. Morgan, The Stamp Act Crisis, Prologue to Revolution (New York: Crowell-Collier Publishing Company, 1963), pp. 44-45.

⁴Andrews, "The Boston Merchants and the Non-Importation Movement," p. 168.

⁵Ibid., p. 199.

forth a show of unexpected unity from the colonists. The Stamp Act was repealed in March of 1766 and the first attempts at non-importation were judged a success. This marked the first time that unity had been achieved in the colonies.⁶ Andrews accounts for this success as being largely the result of two factors: one, the effect the post-war depression had made on trade prior to the agreements, and the other, the fact that merchants on both sides of the water confined their complaints to matters of trade and finance.⁷

Following the Stamp Act crisis the membership in the Boston merchants' association began to dwindle, largely due to the action of radical members. Even during the non-importation movement against the Stamp Act, membership had not been complete. John Mein had been asked to join the merchants in their first attempts at resisting Parliament by boycott but he refused to do so, choosing instead to manage his own affairs without the direction of the merchants.⁸ He had been in Boston slightly less than a year and was interested in establishing himself in a business that relied

⁶Edmund S. and Helen M. Morgan, The Stamp Act Crisis, pp. 368-369.

⁷Andrews, "The Boston Merchants and the Non-Importation Movement," pp. 200-201.

⁸Ibid., pp. 227-228. See also, Schlesinger, Prelude to Independence, p. 105.

heavily upon sources of English credit and supply. Imported English books sold better than American editions, a fact that provided an economic motive for his resistance. Economic factors coupled with an extremely individualistic nature such as Mein displayed give ample reason for his early opposition to the merchants' organization.

In repealing the Stamp Act the British Parliament passed the Declaratory Act asserting their right to tax the colonies in all cases whatsoever. The Townshend Acts that followed were thoroughly anti-trade. The new acts singled out a group of articles formerly imported from Great Britain without restriction and imposed new import duties on them to be collected in American ports. The list of articles included five grades of glass, red and white lead for use in paint, painters' colors, and sixty-seven grades of paper.⁹ While all of these articles could be manufactured in the colonies to a limited extent, the acts did work hardships on the people of the colonies. Paper was the most indispensable article upon which the import duties were placed.

The group which complained the loudest about the Townshend Acts was the Boston merchants. A prime source of irritation for them was the requirement that every vessel,

⁹Dickerson, The Navigation Acts and the American Revolution, p. 196.

even coasters, had to take out a sufferance and a cocket [cocquet] for every article taken on board.¹⁰ Cockets were required to be carried by all ships found to be more than two leagues (seven miles) off the coast. The cocket had to include a complete list of the cargo, description of each package, its contents, by whom shipped, and its destination. A fee was charged by the customs officers for the issuance of the cocket, and the penalty for not having one on board was confiscation of such goods. The two-league rule applied to all coastal traffic, which had formerly been subject only to local control.¹¹ Other grievances voiced by the merchants included the concessions made to the East India Company, the extension of the Admiralty Courts and the granting to them of original and appellate jurisdiction, and the presence of customs collectors whom the merchants described as inferior persons.

In February of 1768 the Massachusetts House of Representatives drafted and sent to other colonial assemblies the famous "Circular Letter" denouncing the Townshend Acts as a violation of the principle of no taxation without

¹⁰ Andrews, "The Boston Merchants and the Non-Importation Movement," p. 172.

¹¹ Dickerson, The Navigation Acts and the American Revolution, pp. 178-179.

representation. The letter evoked a reaction from the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Earl of Hillsborough, who demanded that the House rescind the resolution that resulted in the Circular Letter or face dissolution. Instead of rescinding their action they resolved to send a detailed account of their conduct directly to the King.

On March 1, 1768, a meeting of The Body, then consisting of 98 merchants, was held in the British Coffee House. The members voted to try non-importation again and framed the agreements on the 3rd and 4th of March. The entire agreement was published in most of the newspapers in Boston. The Boston Chronicle did not print the full text of the agreement until August 15, 1769. An excerpt from these agreements follows:

- (1) one year not to send for anything except salt, coals, fish-hooks and lines, hemp and duck, bar-lead and shott, wool-cards and wire
- (2) give preference to merchants who subscribe
- (3) to be effective when most of the principal towns join¹²

In April New York agreed to the plan, provided that Boston and Philadelphia would go along. Philadelphia was suspicious and held out until September of 1768. By November, 1769, the original thirteen colonies except New Hampshire had

¹²Boston Chronicle, August 15, 1769. See also Andrews, "The Boston Merchants and the Non-Importation Movement," p. 201. Both sources contain the complete text of the agreement.

joined, and all of the important cities on the continent were included except Portsmouth, Quebec, Montreal, and ports in Nova Scotia.¹³

The Boston merchants signed their agreements on August 1, 1768, and they were to take effect on January 1, 1769. Rumors of violations of the agreements were circulating two weeks after the agreement became effective. The Body met in January of 1769 to investigate these rumors. Letters were written to officials in the provinces where violations were supposed to have taken place. Replies to these letters denied any illegal importation.

As more vessels began to appear in the ports in the spring, it became obvious that more organization would be needed. On Friday, April 21, 1769, the merchants met to appoint a committee of "Seven Gentlemen" to examine manifests of the vessels that had arrived, or might arrive, to determine whether any goods had been imported contrary to agreement.¹⁴ On Thursday, April 27, the committee reported that "five or six persons who were signers of the late agreement had received a few articles (the remains of former orders) and were ready to deliver them to the care of the

¹³Ibid., p. 221.

¹⁴Boston Chronicle, April 20, 1769.

Committee."¹⁵ Another committee was formed to confer with those persons to consider what means might be proper to prevent further importations. The report indicated that the whole of the goods "amounted to a very inconsiderable sum" and that six signers out of 211 was not a discouraging number of violations. "Those who had imported in the ships lately arrived . . . their importations were very small, and constituted principally of duck and other such articles as were not contrary to the agreement, except six or seven persons whose importations appeared to be as usual."¹⁶ They then resolved not to purchase any goods of any persons who had imported from Great Britain.

On May 1 the merchants' association issued a statement to the public that the merchants' agreement had been strictly adhered to by its signers. On May 8 a Boston Town Meeting aided the merchants' cause by praising the non-importers and urging the inhabitants to withdraw their support from non-subscribers. The following shops were to be shunned: William Jackson, Jonathan Simpson, J. and R. Selkrig (also spelled Selkridge and Selking), John Taylor, Samuel Fletcher, Theophilus Lillie, James McMasters and

¹⁵Boston Chronicle, April 27, 1769. See also Schlesinger, The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, p. 161.

¹⁶Boston Chronicle, May 1, 1769.

Company, Thomas and Elisha Hutchinson, who were sons of the lieutenant governor, and Nathaniel Rodgers, who was a nephew of the lieutenant governor. Schlesinger's investigations into the backgrounds of the individuals on the blacklist revealed that none of them were interested in illegal aspects of trade and no doubt were honest men. The Hutchinson brothers carried on the business of tea importation, an enterprise that would flourish better under the regulation of Parliament. None of them were Tories in any political sense, nor did they hold posts in the government during or after the non-importation dispute.¹⁷ The merchants on the list refused to yield to pressures applied by the Town Meeting or the merchants' association.

The arrival of Hillsborough's letter on May 13 promising a partial repeal of the Townshend Acts alarmed the merchants who had signed the agreement. They feared the effect this letter might have on the moderates of the town and called another meeting for June 24th to prepare a new agreement to resist all importations until all the revenue acts were repealed, including those of 1764 and 1766.¹⁸

Toward the end of May a merchants' committee headed by

¹⁷Schlesinger, The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, p. 159.

¹⁸Andrews, "The Boston Merchants and the Non-Importation Movement," pp. 225-226.

John Hancock called upon the citizens to boycott some of the non-importation violators. The names of the violators were published on a handbill that was widely circulated. John Mein's name was not on the list, but he was angry and defiant at the threats that had been leveled in his direction. He had been harassed daily for months by the heads of the Faction; first with pleas and appeals to his vanity with reminders of how well he had been treated since coming among the Boston merchants, and then with reminders that neutrality was a crime, and importation even worse. He had refused to attend any of the merchants' meetings, as did John Bernard and James McMasters.

On June 1 John Mein opened his attack on the signers of the non-importation agreement in general, and the committee headed by John Hancock in particular. His opening volley was to "undeceive the Public and to inform it" that the ten merchants mentioned in the New York Journal and the Newport Mercury as being violators of the non-importation agreements were not the only ones guilty of this transgression. He had obtained from an "undoubted authority" the information that 21 vessels had arrived at the port of Boston since January first, and that all manner of goods had been imported by 190 different persons, "many of whose names appear in the subscription for non-importation; beside

28 different consignments, to order: . . ."¹⁹ He did not publish the names of the persons, asserting that he would "disclaim such retaliation" even though he had been mistreated in this manner, but that if any person doubted the truth of his charges, they may consult a list of importers in his print shop. This attack brought about a quick response from the merchants' committee. The Boston Gazette carried the reply for the merchants in the issue for June 12, 1769. The writer declared that Mein had included in his list of importers almost one hundred belonging to other ports, as well as clergymen, masters of vessels, and private persons who had imported only a single article for family use. He also objected to Mein's failure to differentiate between permitted items and barred items. Mein included four vessels delayed by storms, and three vessels from Scotland, belonging to strangers who had come over to America to build ships. So far as the signers were concerned the only items to have been imported against the rules were "14 cases, 27 chests, mostly of oil, 36 casks of beer, linseed oil and cheese, 50 hampers, chiefly of empty bottles, and 15 bundles; all of which had been immediately placed under the direction of the committee."²⁰

¹⁹Boston Chronicle, June 1, 1769.

²⁰Schlesinger, The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, p. 162.

Mein replied that the facts were available in the Chronicle office, and anyone who wished could consult them. Up to now the only direct action taken against Mein, aside from threats and public scorn, was his expulsion from the Free American Fire Society because of his "partial, evasive and scandalous" attack on the respectable merchants of the town.²¹ The issue was thereby closed for a time.

On July 26, 1769, the merchants met to work out a boycott against any vessel loaded at a British port with goods forbidden by the agreement. A committee was appointed to examine the manifests of any ships arriving prior to January 1, 1770. The names of any violators were to be published unless they were willing to turn over the imported goods to the safekeeping of the committee. Another committee was formed to increase subscriptions by making a house to house canvass of the Boston citizens. A third committee was formed to prepare a statement of grievance to be presented to the king. This action, coupled with the publication of names in the local newspapers, brought six importers into the agreement. "Jonathan Simpson, Esq; Mr. William Jackson, Mr. Samuel Fletcher, Mr. John Taylor, and Messieurs James and Robert Selkrig . . . are now

²¹Ibid. See also the Boston Gazette, July 10, 1769.

considered as Non-Importers, and are accordingly entitled to the Favour of the Public."²²

At a meeting of the local merchants at Faneuil Hall on August 11, 1769, all the "well-disposed Merchants not only of this, but of almost every Province through the Continent"²³ had resolved on non-importation; importations by local merchants contrary to the agreements must then cause the merchants to be regarded as "enemies to the Constitution of their Country." Three more names were added to the list of merchants to be shunned, "Mr. Cyrus Baldwin, Mr. Gilbert Deblois, and Mr. John Avery, jun." Mein's report of the action taken by the merchants' association did not contain a list of eight other names, but rather had eight blank lines. These men were, however, listed in most of the other papers.²⁴ Five of the men listed were named in the original handbill. They were Theophilus Lillie, McMasters and Company, Thomas and Elisha Hutchinson, and Nathaniel Rogers. In addition three more were added, John Mein, John Bernard, and Richard Clarke & Son. Clarke and Son agreed to sign a few days later.

²²Boston Chronicle, August 14, 1769.

²³Ibid.

²⁴The Massachusetts Gazette or Boston Postboy, August 14, 1769; The Boston Evening Post, August 14, 1769; The Boston Gazette or Country Journal, August 14, 1769; The Massachusetts Gazette or Boston News-Letter, August 17, 1769; Essex Gazette (Salem), August 15, 1769.

The issue of the Boston Chronicle for August 17 carried a brief history of the developments in the non-importation dispute, including the proceedings of the July 26th meeting and the resolves of the August 11th meeting of The Body of merchants. A copy of the August 1768 agreement was added as a reminder for the merchants of the original agreement. Mein devoted almost three pages to the task of charging the signers with gross dishonesty, and presenting his own vindication. In his business as printer, newspaper publisher, bookseller, and bookbinder beyond that he supported seventeen people, fourteen of whom lived under his own roof, and to sign the non-importation agreement would be to cause these people to be unemployed. In his two years as printer he had purchased between three and four hundred pounds lawful money's worth of paper from the mill at Milton and would have purchased more than twice that amount if they could have supplied his entire needs. The lack of adequate supplies of paper prevented the publication of certain works which surely would have met with approval of liberal people. He employed four or five people in his bookbindery and paid his foreman a yearly salary of £69 6s. 8d. lawful money. His bookstore contained titles valuable to the education of the local youth in the arts, sciences, and learned professions. He judged his actions as bookseller not only necessary but laudable. Moreover he

maintained that the non-importation agreement was not generally observed and many respectable people had violated the agreements. To support this statement he announced his plan to publish, in the following issues, the manifests and cockets from over thirty vessels that had arrived from Great Britain since January 1, 1769.²⁵

Mein's method of presenting his evidence did not vary significantly from issue to issue. He printed the words Salt, Coals, Fish Hooks, Lines, Duck, Bar-Lead, Wool-Cards, and Card Wire in large bold-face type in column one, next to the manifest from a particular ship. For example, his first issue contained the manifest from the snow Pitt. The cockets contained a description of each container, its contents, the number in the shipment, and to whom consigned. A column on the cocket labeled "Marks" generally contained the owner's initials or brand, such as "C.N. in a diamond" on a cask of pewter belonging to Clark and Nightingale. The manifests from the brigantines Last Attempt, Lydia, and Paoli, all belonging to John Hancock, were placed in early issues. The names of the owners and the captain, sailing date, and dates of shipments of goods appeared at the head of each manifest and cocket.

The merchants responded with an anonymous advertisement published in the Boston Evening Post and The Boston

²⁵See appendix A.

Gazette for Monday, August 21. The advertisement promised to satisfy the public regarding the charges made against the merchants and asked that judgment be withheld until investigations could be completed and vindications be made. Mein made much of the fact that the "Well Disposed" refused to sign their names to their "True Account," and pointed phrases of shame at Hancock for importing over one hundred pieces of British linen, and a chaise labeled by Mein as a violation of the resolutions of economy. Hancock was out of town at the time so Mr. Palfrey, clerk to Hancock, printed an oath sworn before a Justice of the Peace that the one hundred pieces of British linen were really "100 pieces Russian Duck." Mein published this along with a copy of the cocket, attested to by the London port comptroller, that George Hayley, prominent businessman in London with whom Hancock had frequent dealings, had entered "One Hundred and Thirty Pieces of British Linen"²⁶ in the Lydia on February 7, 1769. Mein asked the reader to consider the word of a prominent merchant in London against that of a clerk. Mein concluded this argument by declaring that he "would never enter into disputes with servants; except in such a case as this, in which the master is absent." He asked the merchants to produce a second "True Account" of other cargoes not accounted for.

²⁶Boston Chronicle, August 17, 1769.

Mein revealed himself to be an excellent propagandist and a keen and relentless disputant. Volleys of charges and personal insults were hurled back and forth between the Boston Chronicle and the Whig organs such as the Boston News-Letter or the Boston Evening-Post and others. These articles were published during a period from August 17, 1769, to March 1, 1770. After the issue of October 19, the publication of the manifests ceased until December 11, 1769. The insults continued, as did the queries and accusations directed at the merchants' committee.

The merchants tried to show that in no case had a signer intentionally violated the agreement, but that the faults that were committed had been unintentional, and that the goods had been stored. In numerous cases it was shown that packages had been wrongly labeled in the manifests, or that clerical errors had caused confusion in the cockets. Replies came to Mein's charges from other sources too, usually in the form of absolute denials. John Avery denied that he had imported anything from Great Britain for the past two years before Mein had accused him of importing china and British linen.²⁷ Francis Green declared that he "did not deviate from the Agreement in any Instance, of Course did not import any Tea," and described Mein as a

²⁷Boston News-Letter, August 31, 1769.

"Mushroom Judge" and "conceited empty Noodle of a most profound Blockhead."²⁸

Mein's replies to these personal attacks usually centered around the anonymity of those who attacked him. He was very anxious to learn the identity of the "Well Disposed" as a quote from the Boston Chronicle for August 31 indicates:

WHO ARE YE? YOU COMMITTEE MEN OF MERCHANTS! WE KNOW YE NOT. ---for from the respectable list of Importers, we are really at a loss to conclude, what are your designations, or where do you reside. . . . Do you never [blush] in secret, or when you meet each other in the street? . . . Do you never start in your sleep when all nature is hush, and only the soul awake at its self review? --Or are you so dead and mortified to every sensation of justice, that you can proceed in the uniform tenor of depravity, without the least remorse, without ever looking behind you?²⁹

Mein was careful to give newspaper space to those merchants who, when called upon to do so, readily submitted signed accounts of why such goods were imported. Palfrey's argument with Mein continued to run its course through the month of August and into September, though Mein made little notice of it in his newspaper, preferring to deal with Hancock in person.

Schlesinger accounts for Hancock's actions during this time in the following manner:

²⁸ Ibid., September 21, 1769.

²⁹ Boston Chronicle, August 31, 1769.

The Newport Mercury, September 4, 1769, . . . observed that Hancock was "one of the foremost of the Patriots in Boston . . . would perhaps shine more conspicuously . . . if he did not keep a number of vessels running to London and back, full freighted, getting rich, by receiving freight on goods made contraband by the Colonies." Hancock himself took no notice of Mein's attack until a letter from the New York Committee of Merchants made allusion to it; and in a signed statement he announced: "This is ONCE FOR ALL to certify to whom it may concern, That I have not in one single Instance, directly or indirectly, deviated from said Agreement; and I now publicly defy all Mankind to prove the CONTRARY." The truth seems to be that the worst irregularity of which he was guilty was an occasional carelessness on the part of his shipmasters in receiving prohibited goods as freight; and this did not become an offense under the Boston agreement until July 26, 1769. The discrepancy between the description in the manifest and the actual contents of Hancock's bales was, in all probability, due to clerical carelessness or possibly to the notorious practice of merchants to doctor their freight lists in order to evade export duties in England.³⁰

The explanations given by the merchants in Boston and Salem were not convincing to the merchants of New York and Philadelphia. They frequently quoted Mein's sheets and later pamphlet. C. M. Andrews quotes a similar line in regard to Hancock's activities:

If Mein's facts are correct, then the Merchants of Boston and Salem and notably John Hancock, were doing a fairly prosperous freighting business in goods made contraband by the merchants. . . . In the face of the facts given it is hardly a sufficient defense of Hancock to say that his "name will shine in the records of fame when infamous Jacobites and Tories will sink

³⁰Schlesinger, The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, pp. 168-169.

in oblivion," however true that statement may be as a prophecy (Boston Gazette, October 9, 1769).³¹

With the issue of the Boston Chronicle for September 21, 1769, Mein embarked upon yet another method of attack on the merchants. He had previously found them to be slow to answer when faced with direct questions about the items mentioned in the cockets and manifests. He began publishing "the CATECHISM of the WELL DISPOSED" which was a series of searching questions yet unanswered in their previous replies to Mein's attacks. These questions and frequent personal attacks upon persons whom Mein accused as violators of the agreement made up the copy for the Boston Chronicle for this period. He managed to insert a page or two of European news, but many local items were crowded from the pages by the war with the merchants.

Mein's character assassination did not begin in earnest until October 26, 1769, when the issue of the Chronicle for that date contained the following "Questions for the Well Disposed":

Who are the "Committee" who have entertained the "base" design of publishing "false" accounts of the importations and of the Importers into this port?

--Surely the following cannot be of the number.

THOMAS CUSHING
JOHN HANCOCK
J. ROWE
EDWARD PAYNE
WILLIAM PHILLIPS
JNO. BARRETT

³¹Andrews, "The Boston Merchants and the Non-Importation Movement," p. 228.

Mein continued with a letter to the Public as to why he was now going to carry out his previous threat of "advertising the Lives and Characters of the Well Disposed." He warned them that this was just a beginning and if they wanted more, to continue with their abusive letters from Salem, Connecticut, and other places. He referred to his old enemy John Hancock as "Johnny Dupe, Esq; alias the Milch Cow of the Well Disposed," and painted a verbal picture of him as having long ears, a silly conceited grin on his face and a bandage over his eyes, richly dressed and surrounded with a crowd of people, some stroking his ears and tickling his nose while others are riffling his pockets. Others were referred to in equally glowing terms; John Rowe as Ned Spindle, and John Barrett as Deacon Clodpate, alias Tribulation Turney, Esq. James Otis did not escape and was labeled Counselor Muddlehead, while Sam Adams was dubbed Samuel the Publican, alias The Psalm Singer. Other persons "of inferior note" saw themselves described as William the Knave, Tom Gawky, William the Horner, or perhaps received more than one name as Captain Tom Lazy, alias Market Tom, alias Belly-Gut Tom. Mein did not publish the real names of any of his "Worthies," nor was it necessary to do so, for the reader was familiar enough with those persons brought to task by Mein to recognize them by his descriptions.³²

³²See Appendix B. Though readers at the time required

Mein never completed his promised exposé of the character of his adversaries beyond this preliminary description which appeared in the Boston Chronicle for Thursday, October 26, which was not published until Saturday, October 28. The publication of this article marked the climax of Mein's Boston career. He had become so unpopular that he had to go about armed with pistols. Two people who resembled Mein and Fleeming had been attacked in an alley with clubs and would have been beaten to death if the mistakes had not been discovered in time.³³ A mass of incriminating evidence against the Boston merchants was broadcast throughout the country by Mein. He became obnoxious to the Bostonians; his subscribers fell off more than half, his bookselling business was ruined, and his printing office and bookstore were besmeared with dirt.³⁴ The afternoon of Saturday, October 28, 1769, the day of the publication of the most damaging article to date, Mein and his partner Fleeming were walking up King Street toward the town-house, presumably on their way home

no "Key to the Characters," Mein privately prepared one. See Papers Relating to New England (Sparks MSS., Harvard College Library), III, 45-47 quoted in Schlesinger, Prelude to Independence, p. 106, footnote 58.

³³George Mason to Joseph Harrison, Boston, October 20, 1769, Sparks MSS., New England Papers, III, 40, quoted in Alden, "John Mein, Scourge of Patriots," p. 586.

³⁴Andrews, "The Boston Merchants and the Non-Importation Movement," p. 228.

from Mein's bookshop to their lodgings above their printing shop in Newbury Street. It was late in the afternoon and a large number of people were in the streets busy with their shopping. A large crowd of enraged citizens had gathered in King Street, among others William Molineaux, Edward Davis, Captain Samuel Dashwood, Captain Duncan Ingraham, and Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Marshall, several of whom had been under attack by Mein's pseudonym article. Mein's own account of the incident as quoted by Alden indicates that the principal people of the town were among the mob, encouraging them; and even a selectman, Jonathan Mason, a very well-respected man in the town, was involved. Mein believed that the mob was preconcerted and that shops on both sides of the street were filled with people waiting for him. According to Mein it was Edward Davis who struck the first blow with his stick and held it in readiness after striking Mein while he walked backwards up the street toward the guardhouse.³⁵ Many others carried canes. A report of the incident from Elizabeth Cuming, an eyewitness, who was visiting Mrs. Kent, a victim of "roomtaz," said she heard "a violent skreeming Kill him, kill," and looked out the window to see the mob pursuing Mein in his retreat toward

³⁵John Mein to Joseph Harrison, November 5, 1769, Sparks MSS, Id., 51, quoted in Alden, "John Mein, Scourge of Patriots," p. 587.

the guardhouse.³⁶ Mein was threatened by the mob, and brandishing his pistol, he threatened to shoot the first person who touched him. He had reached the guardhouse and was starting up the steps to where officers and sentries were ready to protect him when Thomas Marshall struck him on the back with a spade Marshall had picked up at the shop of one Waldo on the way down the street. The blow cut through Mein's coat and waistcoat and made a wound about two inches in length on his left shoulder.³⁷ As Mein related the story, Fleeming fired a pistol shot upon seeing Marshall run up to Mein. Mein's account is too elaborate to be credible and all other evidence points to Mein himself being responsible for firing the shot in question. Elizabeth Cuming said that before running inside the guardhouse he "fired a pistol he had in his hand, loaded only with powder." She shared the unpopular views being championed by Mein and had no reason to want to discredit him. The Massachusetts Gazette of November 2 reported that after Mein was safe inside the entry door he fired off his pistol which tore the sleeve of a soldier's coat, but whether by a bullet or a wad, they could not be sure.³⁸ John Rowe recorded in his diary for

³⁶ Elizabeth Cuming to Elizabeth Smith, Boston, October 28, 1769, J. M. Robbins papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, quoted in Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

October 28 that Mein "got into Ezek' Price's office & from thence fired a Pistol & wounded a Grenadier of the 29th Regiment in the arm."³⁹ Thomas Hutchinson recorded that each of the partners had a pistol in his pocket, and that of the partner (Fleeming) was fired by his fall in the scuffle.⁴⁰ The mob insisted upon Mein's being delivered to them, insulted the guards, and the two regiments of soldiers were ordered to their arms.

An unfortunate seaman, George Greyer, happened to be seized about the same time by another part of the populace. He was accused of having given information about smuggling to the British customs officers and was to be forced to undergo the usual punishment of being tarred and feathered and carted through the streets of the town. The two mobs joined and passed along Newbury Street in the direction of the Liberty Tree. As they went by Mein and Fleeming's printing office a gun was fired from an upper window by a young lad connected with the shop. He was not caught by the mob who broke into the store in search of him, but two guns were found and carried away.

A part of the mob, in the meantime, had gone to

³⁹Anne Cunningham, ed., Letters and Diary of John Rowe (Boston, 1903), p. 194, quoted in Ibid.

⁴⁰Hutchinson, The History of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay, III, p. 186.

Richard Dana, a justice of the peace, and had sworn out a warrant for the arrest of Mein "for having put innocent people in bodily fear." Mein thought that their plan was to get him in the custody of an officer and "it being then dark to knock [him] on the head; and then their usual sayings might have been repeated again: that it was done by boys and negroes, or by nobody."⁴¹

Mein hid in the garret of the guardhouse while a search for him was made by Sheriff Cudworth and a constable, accompanied by Samuel Adams and William Molineaux, armed with the warrant just sworn out. After Adams and Molineaux had given up looking for him, Mein, disguised as a soldier and in uniform, slipped away from the guardhouse to the house of Colonel Dalrymple. From this last refuge he went on board His Majesty's schooner Hope, anchored in the harbor. He stayed on board the Hope for a few days before transferring to the man-of-war Rose. Captain Caldwell of the Rose offered Mein the use of his own stateroom and cabin.⁴² The situation in Boston had become too dangerous for Mein to return to the city and he was forced to spend a two-week exile under the protection of the troops in Castle William until a ship could be arranged for his departure. The mob

⁴¹Alden, "John Mein, Scourge of Patriots," p. 588.

⁴²John Mein to Joseph Harrison, November 5, 1769. Sparks MSS., New England Papers, III, 51, quoted in Ibid.

Mein had faced and fled was the first attempt by the patriots at using mob violence as a political weapon since the arrival of the troops in September of 1768. Having triumphed in the face of the troops, the mob became more of a menace than ever. Elizabeth Cuming at this time observed: "Mr. Mein tis thought has secreted himself on Board the Rose for the people are so exasperated they would sertenly kill him if appered."⁴³ The lieutenant-governor summoned those members of his council as were in town to determine a course of action. Mein wished to prosecute his assailants and appealed to Hutchinson for armed protection.⁴⁴ Mein was warned that if he appeared he would be made a sacrifice.

Events in Boston on November 6 lend validity to the fear that Mein's life was indeed in danger. Pope's Day, November 5, was a traditional day of celebrations held to commemorate the defeat of Guy Fawkes' famous gunpowder plot to blow up King James I and the Parliament in 1605 as a reply to the anti-Catholic laws James was renewing. In 1769 Pope's Day fell on Sunday so the celebration was held on the 6th of November. The traditional rivalry between the South End and the North End of the city that generally broke

⁴³Elizabeth Cuming to Elizabeth Smith, Boston, October 30, 1769, J. M. Robbins Papers, quoted in Ibid.

⁴⁴Hutchinson, The History of the Colony of Massachusetts-Bay, III, pp. 186-188.

out into a free-for-all using stones and barrel staves, had become increasingly more violent and militaristic since the Stamp Act protests.⁴⁵ John Mein, still in exile in Castle William, was a central figure in the celebrations on Pope's Day, 1769. His effigy was taken out with that of the Devil and carted through the streets. A large "lanthorn," or lantern having four sides and carried atop a pole, was constructed and labeled on the sides with comments concerning Mein. On the front of the large lanthorn were the toasts "Love and Unity. --The American Whig-- Confusion to the Torries, and a total Banishment to Bribery and Corruption." On the right side of the lanthorn there was printed an acrostic containing the following poem:

J nsulting Wretch, we'll him expose,
O're the Whole World his Deeds disclose,
H ell now gaups wide to take him in,
N ow he is ripe, Oh Lump of Sin,

M ean is the Man, M--N is his Name,
E nough he's spread his hellish Fame,
I nfernal Furies hurl his soul,
N ine Million Times from Pole to Pole.

The labels on the left side were equally unflattering:

Now shake, ye Torries! see the Rogue behind,
 Hung up like a Scarecrow, to correct Mankind
 Oh had the villian but received his Due
 Himself in person would here swing in view:
 But let the Traitor mend within the Year,
 Or by the next he shall be hanging here.

⁴⁵ Edmund A. and Helen Morgan, The Stamp Act Crisis, pp. 159, 172-173.

Ye Slaves! ye Torries who infest the Land,
 And scatter num'rous Plagues on ev're Hand,
 Now we'll be free, or bath in honest Blood;
 We'll nobly perish for our Country's Good,
 We'll Purge the Land of the Infernal Crew,
 And at one Stroke we'll give the Devil his due.

A smaller lanthorn was also constructed and followed the larger in the procession. The following notices appeared on it:

WILKES and LIBERTY, No. 45.
 See the Informer how he stands
 An enemy to all the land,
 If any one now takes his Part
 He'll go to Hell without a Cart.
 May Discord cease, in Hell be jam'd,
 And factious fellows all be dam'd.

Similar notices appeared on other sides of the small lanthorn:

From _____, the veriest monster on earth
 The fell production of some [baneful] birth,
 These ills proceed, --from him they took their birth,
 The Source Supreme, and Center of all Hate.
 If I forgive him, then forget me in Heaven,
 Or like a WILKES may I from Right be driven.

Here stand the Devil for a Show
 With the I--p----rs in a row,
 All bound to Hell, and that we know.
 Go M--N lade deep with Curses on thy head,
 To some dark Corner of the World repaired
 Where the bright Sun no pleasant Beams can shed,
 And spend thy life in Horror and Despair.⁴⁶

Effigies were also a part of the procession. Mein and his "Servant, &c. --A Bunch of TOM CODS" were the center of the

⁴⁶Boston Chronicle, November 9, 1769. See also Andrews, "The Boston Merchants and the Non-Importation Movement," p. 229 and footnotes thereon.

parade in the cart. The "servant" was no doubt Fleeming and the "Tom Cods," a bunch of small cod fish strung around the small lantern, represented the importers led by Mein.

Mein remained in hiding aboard the Rose for the first weeks in November. He had granted his partner, John Fleeming, powers of attorney to conduct his business affairs in his absence.⁴⁷ Fleeming had somehow managed to escape the mob scene and returned to his home. He continued to publish the Chronicle until it expired on June 25, 1770. He also published five hundred pamphlets containing Mein's catalogue of the principal importations and containing one hundred and thirty pages under the title, State of the Importations from Great Britain into Boston, from Jan. 1769 to Aug. 17, 1769.⁴⁸

Editions were gotten out the following year tabulating the later importations. These pamphlets were widely read and frequently handed out by employees of the Customs Board.⁴⁹ It is probable that Fleeming had help, as Mein had, in framing the verbal blasts leveled at the merchants. Schlesinger cites several persons who were at work behind the scenes, including William Burch of the Customs Board as

⁴⁷Alden, "John Mein, Scourge of Patriots," p. 589.

⁴⁸Boston Chronicle, November 20, 1769, quoted in an ad as "This Day Published."

⁴⁹Schlesinger, The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, p. 170.

well as Samuel Waterhouse, a subordinate revenue officer "whom John Adams considered 'the most notorious scribbler, satirist, and libeller, in the service of the conspirators against the liberties of America.'" ⁵⁰ In the Boston Chronicle for January 13, 1770, there appears an "Extract of a letter from a Gentleman in this Town to his Correspondent in the Country" probably written by Joseph Green, local wit and friend of the cause the Chronicle had championed. In brief his plan "for the good of the public" is that there be no more marriage or giving in marriage until all revenue acts are totally repealed. The citizens are urged to "have no more children because our decency refuses to allow us to impose this slavery upon young" and the depopulation of the country will shock the Ministry at home greater than ever before. In order to carry out his plan he suggests that the Bostonians "have all the WOMEN STORED & a Committee appointed for keeping the KEYS - of which I myself am Chairman." This would be certain to cause all the troops to soon leave. "All who refuse to deliver up their wife or daughter must be deemed AN ENEMY TO HIS COUNTRY." He further suggests that all the retired who are uselessly employed be put to work as errand boys, and

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 170-171. See also by the same author, Prelude to Independence, p. 106.

that he is willing to work for nothing as "public spirit in demands it."⁵¹

John Mein had by this time left Boston. His usefulness there had ended and his only course was to leave. In the two weeks that he remained in hiding he had armed himself with letters from Governor Hutchinson for Lord Hillsborough, and from his friend James Murray to the latter's sister, Mrs. Elizabeth Smith, then visiting from England.⁵² With these letters he had hoped to be of some further use to the Tory cause as well as "to make . . . the mischievous Intentions of the Boston patriots turn out to his Emolument."⁵³ His motives in going to England were not entirely those of personal safety. He had for some time been in financial difficulty. His newspaper had dropped in circulation and no books had been published since 1768. Between May 13, 1765, and February 9, 1769, Mein had bought from Thomas Longman, London bookseller, books and merchandise worth £2,100. He had paid only 419 on account. He owed his stationery suppliers, Messrs. Wright and Gill of London, £303.⁵⁴ Both creditors had begun to press him for

⁵¹Boston Chronicle, January 18, 1770.

⁵²Alden, "John Mein, Scourge of Patriots," p. 589.

⁵³James Murray to Elizabeth Smith, November 12, 1769, J. M. Robbins Papers, quoted in Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 590. See also Bolton, "Circulating Libraries in Boston, 1765-1865," p. 199.

payment, and finally, in the autumn of 1769, they joined in giving John Hancock power of attorney to attach Mein's books. If Mein had intended to default in payment of these debts it is unlikely that he would have sought refuge in England. He sailed for England on the 17th of November, 1769, aboard the schooner Hope, on which he had first taken refuge. The Hope was reported to have arrived at Halifax the following Friday, November 21, and was again sighted off Spithead about the middle of the following month.⁵⁵ He arrived in London in December of 1769.

Upon his arrival in London Mein called upon Longman to inform him that steps had been taken for the termination of his business in Boston and that when this was done he would pay Longman his debts promptly. Longman had already written to Hancock asking him to act on his behalf in the matter of collecting the Mein account. This was done on July 22, 1769, and on March 1, 1770, an attachment was issued upon the Mein and Fleeming printing shop in Newbury Street.⁵⁶ Some arrangement must have been made, for Fleeming continued to publish the Boston Chronicle. This was probably a compromise of some sort between Hancock, acting

⁵⁵Massachusetts Gazette, November 24, 1769; January 15, 1770, as quoted in Alden, "John Mein, Scourge of Patriots," p. 589.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 590. See also Bolton, "Circulating Libraries in Boston, 1765-1865," p. 199.

in behalf of Longman, and Fleeming, who published some books on his own imprint until June 21, 1770.⁵⁷ James Murray, an eminent Scotsman and friend of Mein, drew up proposals to have the attachments withdrawn and the suit tried in King's Bench; the property would be delivered up to Hancock as attorney when executions came to be issued.⁵⁸ Hancock declined the offer and went ahead with the attachment proceedings. Some authors have concluded that Mein returned to Boston early in 1770. Charles K. Bolton believed this to be true, as did Professor Schlesinger and C. M. Andrews.⁵⁹ John E. Alden believes that this conclusion is not warranted, particularly in view of a letter from Mein to James Murray, dated London, January 25, 1770, located in the J. M. Robbins Papers at the Massachusetts Historical Society. The conclusion that Mein was present at his trial in the Boston courts is not justified by present facts. The case

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 590.

⁵⁸Bolton, "Circulating Libraries in Boston, 1765-1865," p. 199. Bolton notes that an account of Mein's financial troubles and the relationship between Mein and Murray may be found in the Letters of James Murray, pp. 168-174.

⁵⁹Ibid.; Arthur M. Schlesinger, "Propaganda and the Boston Newspaper Press, 1767-1770," *The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, Publications*, XXXII (1937), p. 415; Andrews, "The Boston Merchants and the Non-Importation Movement," p. 230.

was conducted for him through powers of attorney left with Fleeming.⁶⁰

Mein was arrested in May of 1770 on the order of Longman who was acting on the advice of Hancock. An undated letter quoted by Alden as having probably been written in February, 1771, by Longman to Hancock contained the following information:

In pursuance of your advice in favour, that I should endeavor to get further Security in London, I immediately arrested Him, in hopes of His having some Friends that would appear in His behalf, in consequence of which I had the honour of a visit from Mr. Commissioner Robinson⁶¹ who assured me to His knowledge He knew Mein's Effects were much more then would satisfy not only me, but every other Creditor, and that when they were sold by his friends would take care to bid them in such a manner, that my whole Debt should be discharged.⁶²

Longman went on to report that Mein had received a hearing in the Court of Kings Bench and tried to obtain his discharge by a false affidavit. Longman never got a copy of that affidavit, which was delivered to Hancock. The affidavit, which was dated November 20, 1770, and addressed to the Judges of the Court of King's Bench, in substance is letters from Fleeming and other Boston citizens as to the

⁶⁰Alden, "John Mein, Scourge of Patriots," p. 591.

⁶¹This is the same John Robinson, Commissioner of Customs in Boston, best known for his attack upon James Otis in the British Coffee House, an encounter not unlike the attack of Mein upon Gill.

⁶²Alden, "John Mein, Scourge of Patriots," p. 591.

good faith of Mein and the efforts being made to satisfy Hancock's demands. How long Mein remained in prison is not known. The final judgment against Mein was secured by Hancock in the Massachusetts Court of Judicature in January, 1772, after the case had dragged on for almost two years. It is not known whether Mein's release came as a result of the Insolvency Act, or whether he was freed to continue his propaganda attacks upon the Boston Merchants. In the meantime Mein had petitioned the government for compensation for his sufferings at the hands of the Boston mob.⁶³ This was written for Mein by James Murray and presented to the Lords of the Treasury by John Robinson. It was attested to by Charles Stewart, cashier and paymaster of the Boston Board of Customs, who was on the spot at the time of the presentation. The date of his release is not known.

John Mein did not again achieve public notice until the early months of 1774, this time as the probable author of the letters signed "Sagittarius" published in the London Public Ledger. There is no complete file of this newspaper and accordingly all of these letters are not available. It is not possible to say when Mein first began to write for

⁶³ Dickerson, "British Control of American Newspapers on the Eve of the Revolution," pp. 453-468. Memorials for John Green and Joseph Russell as well as John Fleeming are reprinted here in entirety.

the Public Ledger. Alden suggests that it was probably in February of 1774.⁶⁴ Within a period of six months, during which time important measures regarding America were being discussed in Parliament, over sixty items of propaganda were printed under the title "Sagittarius Letters." During these tense days of 1775 preceding the nineteenth of April, these letters appeared in Boston bound in a small volume entitled Sagittarius's Letters and Political Speculations. It must have created some controversy as it contained a scathing attack upon Bostonians in general and the leaders of the Patriot movement in particular. The authorship of the Sagittarius Letters remained in doubt for quite some time. Under-Secretary of State for America William Knox was a prime suspect since it was believed that whoever published the letters must have had access to the "most secret papers" in the archives of the Plantations Office. The "State Papers" turned out to be available in Governor Hutchinson's Collection of Original Papers Relative to the History of Massachusetts-Bay, which had been published in 1769. John E. Alden calls attention to the issue of the London Public Ledger for July 11, 1774, wherein a correspondent calling himself "Minos" correctly identified the author of the Sagittarius Letters as John Mein, though by description

⁶⁴Alden, "John Mein, Scourge of Patriots," p. 593.

rather than by name.⁶⁵ Two days later the Public Ledger contained a vindication of the Bostonian cited by "Minos" under the signature of "Truth," who may well have been Mein. Mein's name was not used until the counterattack appeared on September 24 in the Public Ledger, and then it was misspelled as "one Maine, a rank Scotchman." John Alden cites further evidence on the verso of the title page of John Carter Brown Library's copy of the Mein and Fleeming edition of William Knox's anonymous Controversy between Great Britain and Her Colonies Reviewed. Mein is cited as the author of Sagittarius' letters, by someone leaving "a note written in an eighteenth Century hand."⁶⁶ Isaiah Thomas listed the Boston edition of the letters with the same attribution and stated that in London Mein engaged himself under the pay of the ministry as a writer against the colonies, but after the war began he sought other employment.⁶⁷

Mein proved to be an effective propagandist for the British ministry. The government undertook a series of acts punishing Boston for the Boston Tea Party in part, and for the town's general conduct. The Boston Port Bill was passed

⁶⁵Alden, "John Mein, Scourge of Patriots," pp. 572-574 is a rehearsal of Mein's career written by a strong critic.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 576.

⁶⁷Thomas, History of Printing, I, p. 154.

and the Massachusetts Bay charter was altered so as to allow better regulation of the colony. These were followed by a third coercive measure, that of holding trials for capital offenses in England, rather than in the colony. These acts were justified daily in the writings of "Sagittarius" in the pages of the London Public Ledger. He followed the pattern of most propagandists: praising his partisans and criticizing his foes. Criticism and invective came easily to Mein's writing and his experiences as publisher of the Boston Chronicle in a time of heated political controversy stood him in good stead. The colony of Massachusetts had reason to regret that they had driven John Mein into exile.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

The reasons for John Mein's coming to America were probably economic, rather than religious, political, or to satisfy a desire for adventure. He came prepared to enter the business of selling books. It is true that he came to America with the Sandemanians and that many of his friends belonged to this religious group, but there is no evidence that he shared their religious convictions. The reasons for Mein's unpopularity in the colonies had little or nothing to do with his religion, or lack of it. It is doubtful that the Bostonians, with whom he soon fell into disfavor, ever seriously held the issue of religion against him. He published a number of religious works and sold Sandemanian literature in his bookstore along with a wide variety of literary works representing several points of view. He insisted from time to time that he was non-political, and probably was, at the outset of his career, more interested in making money than in gaining political power. His arrival came at a time when Americans were beginning to show their first signs of unity in a political cause. He was not of the generation who had grown up away from England, and it is therefore likely that his Tory sympathies were easily aroused by the merchants in the non-importation

dispute. In any event, a Tory point of view would not have occasioned his leaving England for the colonies to seek political refuge. There is no evidence that Mein's presence in America was a part of any plot by Parliament to plant propagandists in the American colonies. It is true that each colonial governor had at least one newspaper under his control, and the Customs Board awarded lucrative contracts to their "stationers." It is likely that Mein came under the influence of the Customs Board and handled their propaganda because it was the only source of income he could find to wage war against the Boston merchants, whom Mein felt were demanding that he submerge his identity and individuality for a cause he was not in favor of supporting. There is no evidence that Mein was in the pay of Governor Bernard nor influenced by the governorship in any manner prior to becoming the Royal Stationer. There is no reason to believe that Mein's arrival in America was the result of a "spirit of adventure" even though his short stay in the colonies proved to be an adventure, to say the least.

An effort to understand Mein's motives with any degree of certainty must hinge on further understanding of Mein as a man, his family background, his education, his hopes and aspirations, and his relationships with other men. Practically nothing is known about his early years. His date of birth is uncertain, and nothing is known of him

prior to his coming to America beyond his association with the Sandemanians. This information must wait for future investigations using materials not available in this study. It is safe to say that he possessed a high degree of intelligence and journalistic ability. Judging from his early success in business and participation in civic affairs, he had won the confidence of the people of Boston and the respect of his fellow journalists. That he exhibited a tremendous capacity for work and a high degree of courage is evidenced by the detail and nature of his "State of Importations . . ." even when it is realized that he had help. But in dealing with those who opposed his point of view, Mein displayed an almost uncontrollable temper.

Mein's role in the colonies as a bookseller, proprietor of a print shop, publisher, and newspaper co-owner placed him in a position of trust and respect in the community, and also afforded him access to the public mind. His refusal to join the non-importation movement was based on his contention that he was neither merchant nor importer and therefore had no interest in the problems of the merchants with Great Britain. His news print and type supplies were sometimes purchased abroad, but he steadfastly maintained that they were not available locally, and therefore no other course was open to him. To have joined the movement would have meant economic disaster to himself as well

as to those printers and apprentices who depended upon him for their livelihood. Standing up for principle and fighting for his individuality cost Mein his place in Boston society and transformed him into a figure of hatred and scorn in the colonies. His literary bombasts and caustic editorializing brought the scorn of the Sons of Liberty down upon him with full force, especially since he questioned the character and motives of the leaders of the movement. Many of these men, particularly John Hancock, were men of power and wealth on both sides of the Atlantic. It was Hancock who finally silenced Mein in the colonies and was responsible for pressing court actions in favor of Mein's creditors that eventually led to his imprisonment in England for debts he was unable to pay.

It is difficult to assess Mein's influence as a propagandist as author of the Sagittarius Letters while under the pay of the British ministry. The letters were published at a time when Parliament was considering stronger measures against the rebellious colonies, and no doubt were read by many men of high and low station, and probably had an influence upon all who read them. He had learned the art of propaganda writing well during his stay in Boston. Events there gave him reason to desire an opportunity to make his Boston tormentors regret their rough treatment of him.

Nothing is known of Mein's later life and activities

in England. No records available for this study give any indication that he ever again rose to any measure of prominence in the affairs of the Empire. Like most of his career, the time and circumstances of his later years and death are unknown.

In summary it might be said that this study has offered more unanswered questions than solutions of probable causes. There is no doubt that the presence of John Mein on the scene in Boston in the pre-revolutionary years had an influence on events there and in England in later years. His contributions to the publishing and printing industry alone are significant enough to warrant a study of this nature. His newspaper, The Boston Chronicle, when compared with others of its day, shows that he produced one of the most readable, best edited, and typographically most modern newspapers of the day. His ventures in the field of publishing books and pamphlets helped in the development of the intellectual climate in early America, and his circulating library helped keep the New England colonial one of the best-read in the empire and filled a real need in colonial times in this respect. His vigil from the Customs House on importations during the non-importation agreement brought those merchants who supported the movement to account for the slightest violation of their agreements. While this had the effect of casting doubts upon the good intentions of

the Boston merchants, it also caused considerable care to be exercised by the proponents of the agreement, and ironically, lent strength to the very movement Mein opposed.

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APPENDIX A

August 17th, 1769

To the PUBLIC

MY NAME being inserted in the above advertisement, the purpose of which is sufficiently evident, and published on Monday August 14, 1769 in the Massachusetts Gazette or Boston-Post Boy, printed by J. Green and J. Russell, in the Boston Gazette or Country Journal, printed by Edes and Gill, in the Massachusetts Gazette or Boston News Letter of this day, printed by R. Draper, and in the Essex Gazette of the 15th of August, printed by Samuel Hall in Salem; I have thought it necessary for the information of the public and out of regard to my character, to enter upon my own vindication.

Every individual has a natural right to defend his person or his reputation, and in society to act with freedom under obedience to the Laws; I shall therefore attend these "WELL DISPOSED MERCHANTS," as they call themselves, through the whole course of their transactions and the whole tenor of their conduct, being fortunately possessed of proper materials and authorities for accomplishing this undertaking, which though laborious, will afford matter of great curiosity, and I hope will prove of signal utility to the Public, by opening a view into the behavior of these "Well Disposed" Gentlemen.

In pursuance of this task, I shall present facts, not offer conjectures; and as I have taken up the pen, not with an intention to injure, but to vindicate and correct, the public shall find me decent and candid, but not, on that account, less resolute and persevering. To render this address useful to the Gentlemen themselves, it shall be my care to collect the features of their actions, which I earnestly recommend to them to treasure up as a precious record, and when in the future they feel themselves disposed to engage in any affair of importance, I give it as my best advice, that they ought to read this publication with the most diligent attention, as it will certainly operate effectually as a preservative against the further commission of folly -----; It is not their ruin, but their reformation I fervently wish for, however "well disposed" they may have shewn themselves to injure me. --- I therefore bespeak the candour, the patience, and the attention of the public, with whose countenance and favour I have been so often and so greatly indulged, and of which

my heart shall ever retain the most grateful remembrance.

In my daily Occupations I daily support no less than seventeen People, fourteen of whom live under my own roof, the greater part of these must have been turned off destitute, or have been supported in idleness, had I signed the Agreement. With regard to the consumption of articles manufactured here, I have, within little more than two years, being the time since I commenced Printer, purchased PAPER, for the Printing Business made at Milton, to the value of between three and four hundred Pounds Lawful Money; and I would have purchased double that amount if the Makers could have supplied me. And in particular, very lately, I wanted to agree with them for paper to the value of upwards three hundred pounds lawful money, on purpose to reprint here, a work, the production of the most excellent Writer now existing, in which order, government and civil society are traced from the first dawnings of light, till they advanced to the full splendor of day. --A work which could hardly fail of a meeting with a favourable reception among a liberal people, whose sources of instruction ought to equal their thirst for knowledge.

In the BOOKBINDING TRADE in which I have always four or five People constantly employed, to the Foreman of whom I pay yearly in Cash Sixty nine Pounds Six Shillings and Eight Pence Lawful money; and in which business I do not use materials to the value of twenty Pounds Lawful through the whole year that is [Erata change to are p. 267] not manufactured in this Province.

As to my BUSINESS OF BOOKSELLING, the necessity that a people, eager after learning, and possessed of all the natural endowments of genius and parts requisite to its attainment, are [under] of purchasing Books for the education of youth, for instruction in the Arts, sciences and learned professions, renders their importation not only necessary, but laudable.

Having now given my reasons for declining to sign the Agreement concerning Non-Importation, which I hope will appear justifiable in the eye of the public; I now think it my duty to review the conduct of "The Well Disposed Merchants," and in order to show that I sincerely wish to do them all justice, I shall print verbatim their Agreement of August, 1768, with their notifications and advertisements to June 1st 1769, on which day, the snow Pitt, Capt. Tapscott, entered the Customs-house here, from Bristol in England, exactly ten months after the agreement was signed.

The following manifest, and some others which will be speedily published, with the many respectable names in them, will best show the truth of their assertion, that the non-importation agreement was generally conformed to, and that the importations were trifling. --It must likewise be proper to inform the Public that upwards of Thirty

Vessels have arrived in this port from Great-Britain since January 1st 1769, and that an exact account of their cargoes, shall be published in the course of this paper. --The one now published, is all at present that the attention due my other avocations, would allow me time to prepare for the inspection of the public.

APPENDIX B

OUTLINES

of the
CHARACTERS

of some who are thought to be
WELL - DISPOSED

TOMMY TRIFLE ESQ: [Thomas Chushing] JOHNNY DUPE, ESQ;
[John Hancock] alias the Milch-cow of the "Well Disposed":
a characteristick will be given with this history, repre-
senting a good natured young man with long ears -- a silly
conceited grin on his countenance -- a fool's cap on his
head -- a bandage tied over his eyes -- richly dressed
and surrounded with a crowd of people, some of whom are
stroking his ears, others tickling his nose with straws,
while the rest are employed in riffling his pockets: all
of them with labels over their mouths, bearing these words,

Our Common Friend

In this history will be related in what manner the great
fortune he is possessed of was accumulated; justice shall
also be done to the amiable part of his character; but
wherever he had deviated, as he often has widely, from
the rule of right, he shall undergo due correction; but
as it is believed he is not irretrievably lost, he natu-
rally will be entitled to a share of pity and advice. --
Likewise will be given, a scheme for an application to
Assessors: --a dissertation on the nature of oaths: --
with many mournful reflections on the sudden death of a
friend.

**** *, Esq.

NED SPINDLE [John Rowe]

The ill bred apologizer for the "Well Disposed," who
thought the vindication of their characters too trifling
a matter to sign their names to it.

DEACON CLODPATE, Alias

Tribulation Turney, Esq; [John Barrett]

With a particular account of his gratitude to his best
friends, and the way in which he obtained his money

TRANSMUTATION WOOL - CARDS, Esq.

Alias Deacon Conceit

**** *, Esq.

The two that follow, though they have not appeared publicly, are suspected of being even more "Well Disposed" than the above seven.

COUNSELOR MUDDLEHEAD, Alias

Jemmy with the Maiden Nose, [James Otis] author of many "Well disposed" pieces from Salem, one of them of ancient date. --An account of his progenitors, and of a famous expedition to Londonderry, with the succeeding glorious retreat of a certain Doctor. His own great valour. --His desperate challenge to his brother the Barber; and the prudence which he displayed in changing his mind, through the perswasion of his friends. To all which will be added his great integrity, consistency and firmness in various scenes of life; with a critical dissertation on two of his leading pamphlets.

The Experiences of

SAMUEL, THE PUBLICAN, Alias

The Psalm Singer, [Sam Adams] with the gifted face. -- In which may be introduced the author of Alfred, and some curious anecdotes relating to a Land Bank Scheme, for the instruction of the Country Gentlemen.

Others of inferior note

William the knave

The GRUNTING CAPTAIN,

Alias, one of the unclean Beasts out of Noah's Ark.

TOM GAWKY

Alias the English Calf. --Under this head will be narrated all his droll practices behind the counter, with the wonderful story of his falling in love, and his ridiculous behavior under disappointment.

WILLIAM the Horner,

with an emblematical print.

CAPT. TOMMY LAZY

Alias Market Tom, alias Belly-Gut Tom, --many curious anecdotes will be given in this life, &c. Such as the valorous achievements of his Forefathers, some of their hair breadth escapes --

The Chapter of Noses -- A new plan for Letter Writing from Connecticut, with a Specimen, --The whole illustrated with a Frontspiece descriptive of a journey to and from the

Southward, during which there was good eating and drinking, and nothing to pay. The principal figure with a pair of ducks in one hand and the other in Squire Dupe's Pocket.

THE LEAN APOTHECARY, or the writer of a piece signed Humanus: with a detail of his behavior in youth: --in his profession of retailing drugs and simples, --and in the marriage state. --The dissection of this living subject will be very disagreeable from its mortified state, yet it will have the effect of operating in terrorem, just as gibbeted malefactors.

***The Public are desired to consider all these Characters; &c. as imaginary, and to believe that no such people ever existed.

Many other Worthies shall figure in print; exclusive of the above mentioned, but want of time will not admit at present of enumerating all the personages; only a surprizing relation may be published concerning the disposal of Money, commonly called Poors Money.

The above is

A VERY FAINT SKETCH

of what will be produced if the "Well disposed" continue their weekly emissions.