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Life and Character of John Dicinson

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PAPERS OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF DELAWARE.

XXX.

THE LIFE AND CHARACTER OF JOHN DICKINSON.

BY

ROBERT H. RICHARDS, Esq.

Read before the Historical Society of Delaware, May 21, 1900.

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF DELAWARE,
WILMINGTON.
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JOHN DICKINSON.

1732-1808.

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Press of J. B. Lippincott Company, Philadelphia.

THE LIFE AND CHARACTER

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JOHN DICKINSON.

THE name of Dickinson, while not a *very* common one, has been well known in various parts of the country for several generations. There are in this country two general branches of the family, one of which is found to have first appeared in the New England States and the members of which were Presbyterians, and the other immigrated to the Middle and Southern States.

Those who bear the name in the Middle and Southern States are descended from Charles Dickinson, who died in London in 1653, leaving three sons, all of whom were Quakers. In 1654 these sons emigrated to Virginia to escape imprisonment at home as Non-conformists.

There is a legendary account of the renown achieved by the English ancestors of the family as soldiers, but of this there appears to be no authentic record. It is important perhaps for us to know, however, that this family belonged to that middle class of English society which, we may safely say, has had more to do with shaping the destinies of England in modern times than any other.

The family coat of arms consisted of a shield divided horizontally by a single bar, above and below which a lion, and at the top of the shield a visored helmet surmounted by a lion rampant. The motto was *esse quam videri,* "to be rather than to seem;" and a careful study of the life of John Dickinson impels one to the belief either that the selection of this motto by the Dickinson family must have been the result of some deep-rooted, uneradicable family characteristic, or that John Dickinson made it the motto of his life.

Of the three brothers to whom I have referred, Walter, the immediate ancestor of the subject of this sketch, removed in 1659 to Talbot County, on the Eastern shore of Maryland. He there purchased a plantation, which he called "Crosia-doré," on the shores of the Choptank River, and this estate, from the day of its settlement until the present hour,—a period of over two centuries and a half,—has always been the home of the same Dickinson family, the present owner and occupant being in the direct line of descent from the original proprietor.

At Crosia-doré, on the 8th of November, 1732, John Dickinson was born. He was the second son of Samuel Dickinson, the grandson of the first proprietor of the estate, and of Mary Cadwalader, his second wife, of Philadelphia.

Samuel Dickinson was bred to the law, but, at the time of the birth of his son John, was living upon his Maryland estate the life of a country gentleman.

In 1740 Samuel Dickinson removed to Kent County,

Delaware, where he purchased an estate of about one thousand three hundred acres near Dover. It is thought that this change of residence was made because of the fact that Dover furnished better educational advantages than the locality in which Samuel Dickinson was living. At this day the descendants of Samuel Dickinson are among the largest land owners in Kent County, possessing more than three thousand acres.*

At Dover, Samuel Dickinson, who shortly after his removal was appointed first Judge of the Court of Common Pleas, secured the services of William Killen, a young Irishman, as a tutor for his son John.

We know very little about William Killen, but the fact that he subsequently became the Chief Justice and afterwards Chancellor of Delaware is sufficient testimony of his ability.

In those days the prevalent idea of an education embraced little more than a thorough knowledge of classical literature. "It is certainly not a little remarkable in the history of teaching," says Dr. Stillé, "that, under the instruction of this young Irishman, himself but fifteen years of age when he went to Dover, Dickinson should not only have early imbibed a love of classical literature, but that his studies should have taught him that comprehensiveness of view and those forms of expression which are characteristic of the ancient classical authors. If there is any truth in the saying, 'The style is the man,' it was true of

* The last statement is taken from Scharf's "History of Delaware."

Dickinson. It would be difficult to over-estimate the power which this style, derived from those who wrote in what is erroneously called a dead language, enabled him to exercise in the political controversies in which he was engaged."

In 1750, when John Dickinson was eighteen years old, he was entered as a student of the law in the office of John Moland, Esq., of Philadelphia, one of the leading lawyers in that city and King's Attorney in Pennsylvania. We may pause here to observe that the connotation of the term "student of the law" was vastly different in those days from now. The industry and luminous ability of Mr. Justice Blackstone had not yet blazed the way into the intricate mazes of the common law, but the road to this "perfection of human reason" led through the austere portals of the venerable Coke's Commentaries upon Littleton, and the Year-Books.

After three years in Philadelphia, Mr. Dickinson prevailed upon his father to send him to England, as was customary in those days with men of means, to finish his legal education at the Temple. He remained here at the Middle Temple for four years, having as fellow-students such men as Lord Thurlow, afterwards Lord Chancellor; Kenyon, Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench; John Hill, afterwards Earl of Hillsborough, and William Cowper, the poet.

Let me refer here to some statistics furnished by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. I stated above that it was customary before the Revolution for young men

who contemplated practising the profession of the law to complete their studies in England, at the fountain-head of the common law. This statement is subject to sectional restriction, for an investigation has shown that this custom was almost exclusively confined to the Middle and Southern States; the number of young men educated in England increasing as we go farther south; South Carolina possessing the greatest number, and the New England States almost none. We shall see, I think, the effect of this hereafter.

Mr. Dickinson returned to Philadelphia and began to practise his profession in 1757. Of him as a lawyer we know comparatively little. In a letter written to his mother shortly after he began to practise, he urges her to come to Philadelphia, says that he is busy, and that "the money is flowing in." In the first volume of Dallas's Reports we find that there are three cases mentioned which Mr. Dickinson argued in the Supreme Court in 1760. One of these was a case of "foreign attachment;" the second an ejectment case, and the third a question of criminal procedure. William Rawle, the elder, speaking of Dickinson as a lawyer, says, "He possessed considerable fluency, with a sweetness of tone and agreeable modulation of voice, not well calculated, however, for a large audience. His law knowledge was respectable, although not remarkably extensive, for his attention was directed to historical and political studies. Wholly engaged in public life, he left the bar soon after the commencement of the American Revolution." Whatever may have been the depths of his

legal learning, it is quite certain that his early prominence in public life was largely due to the reputation he had gained as a lawyer.

In October, 1760, he was elected a member of the Assembly of the "Lower Counties," as Delaware was then called, and upon taking his seat was made Speaker of that body.

In 1762 he was chosen a member of the Pennsylvania Assembly from the city of Philadelphia. He writes to his friend, George Read, concerning this election, in the following noble strain: "I flatter myself that I came in with the approval of all good men. I confess that I should like to make an immense bustle in the world, if it could be done by virtuous actions; but as there is no probability in that, I am content if I can live innocent and beloved by those I love." The question which almost exclusively occupied the attention of the Pennsylvania Assembly at the time of Dickinson's entrance into it was whether or not the Assembly on behalf of the people should petition the king to abrogate the Proprietary Charter and take the government of the province into his own hands. Mr. Dickinson opposed this measure, and led the fight for the opposition; against him were Joseph Gallaway, the greatest lawyer of his time in Pennsylvania, and Benjamin Franklin, the apostle of common sense, already loaded with honors and degrees by all the universities of Europe. Dickinson was completely successful.

Now begins Dickinson's career in that field in which he was most successful, and in which he stands without

a peer, as the pensman of the Revolution. We know of no man in history who, by his pen, through the means of pamphleteering, exercised a greater influence upon the thought, action, and policies of his time than did John Dickinson. In 1765, during the discussion in Parliament of the "Stamp Act," he printed a pamphlet entitled "The Late Regulations respecting the British Colonies on the Continent of America considered." It is impossible to consider the contents of each of these numerous pamphlets or their influence upon events, and we can do scarcely more than enumerate them. Dickinson was a member of the Stamp Act Congress, and in that body a mighty opponent of the right of the English Parliament to tax the colonies for revenue without their consent.

On the 2d of December, 1767, in the *Pennsylvania Chronicle,* under date of November 7, the anniversary of the day upon which William of Orange had landed in England, a day of ill-omen to those who, the colonists contended, were governing them in the same arbitrary manner as that in which James II. had governed their forefathers, there appeared the first of that great series known as the "Farmer's Letters." These letters, twelve in number, have been said to contain more "practical and applied political philosophy than is to be found in many elaborate treatises." To most Americans they became, until the beginning of the war, a genuine political text-book, and their maxims were received with absolute confidence. Like the writings of Burke, which they greatly resemble, they form a great storehouse of political wisdom

with reference to the fundamental questions that were occupying the attention of Americans and Englishmen at the time of their publication. After the series was complete, they were collected and published by Richard Henry Lee, of Virginia, by Benjamin Franklin in Dublin, and at about the same time were published in Paris. Benjamin Franklin, Dickinson's ancient and continued enemy, himself secured their publication in Dublin and Paris. There were also two editions printed in Boston.

These letters were received with enthusiasm throughout the colonies, and the "Pennsylvania Farmer" found himself looked upon as the foremost patriot of America.

About this time the first cargoes of tea arrived in the colonies since the passage of the bill taxing tea in America, and it is interesting to know that the citizens of Philadelphia held a meeting, at which Dr. Thomas Cadwalader presided and Dickinson took a prominent part, to take steps to prevent the landing of tea in Philadelphia, seventeen days before the similar meeting was held in Boston which preceded the famous Boston tea-party. Such drastic measures as were resorted to in Boston were not, however, found necessary in Philadelphia.

Mr. Dickinson suffered from the position he took in the Pennsylvania Assembly upon the question of the Proprietary charter, and at the expiration of his term was not re-elected. After devoting his leisure to study and reflection, the results of which are seen in the "Farmer's Letters," he became again a member of Assembly in 1771. On the 5th of March of this year, at the request of the

Assembly, he drafted a petition to the king, which was unanimously adopted. The petition, which is in the tone of the most loyal devotion to the Crown, asks that the people of Pennsylvania may be restored to the condition they were in before 1763.

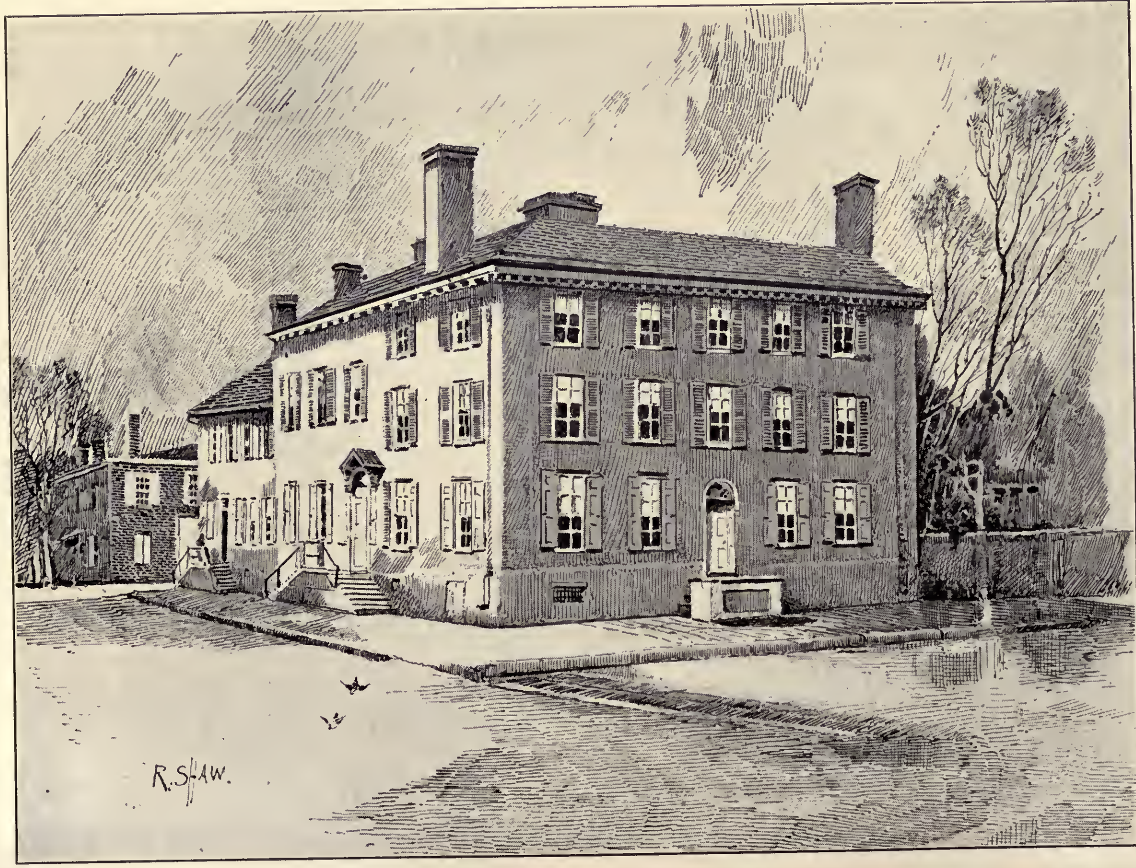
In the mean time, in 1770, Dickinson had been married to Miss Mary Norris, the only daughter of Isaac Norris, for many years Speaker of the Pennsylvania Assembly, but then deceased, and with his wife resided at Fairhill, the beautiful country home of the Norris family, where was collected one of the finest libraries in America. Dickinson was married on July 19, and the only wedding-tour we can find any record of began some time in September, the itinerary of the journey touching Reading, Bethlehem, Lancaster, York, and the frontier town of Carlisle, being, in fact, a tour of Pennsylvania. Let us stop to quote from a letter written by Dickinson to an aunt during the journey, dated September 20, 1770.

Among other things he says, " We dined at Pottsgrove, and among memorable things it may be put down as one, that after proper respect paid to a beefsteak, somebody desired an egg to be poached. It may also be added as another remarkable fact that yesterday completed *two months* of marriage without a quarrel. . . . To-morrow we proceed for Carlisle, which I expect to reach on Saturday." This journey, however, had a double purpose. It was not known what position the German and Scotch-Irish inhabitants of Pennsylvania would take upon the question of resistance to the English Parliament, and Dickinson

desired to sound them on this point. It is needless to say that he found them all the stanchest patriots.

As the hour approached when the fate of America was to be tried, Dickinson, with the wise conservatism of a man bred to the law and learned in the classics, having ever before him the precedents of history, began to shrink from the advanced course taken by the patriots of New England. He refused to endorse the measures of Massachusetts. He did not think America in the best condition for revolution at that time. Consequently in New England he fell from the high estate in the popular estimation that once he held, and, instead of the greatest American patriot, was called " timid" and " apathetic."

He was chosen a delegate from Pennsylvania to the first Congress in 1774, and was immediately placed upon a committee to draft a petition to the king, which he did personally, as well as a subsequent petition to the king passed at the next Congress. These petitions rank among the other state papers prepared by Dickinson, and he, in fact, was the author of practically all of the many issued by Congress during this period, whose ample eulogium is the tribute paid to them by Lord Chatham when he said in the House of Lords, " History, my Lords, has been my favorite study, and in the celebrated writings of antiquity I have often admired the patriotism of Greece and Rome, but I must declare and vow that in the master states of the world I know not the people nor the Senate who, in such a complication of difficult circumstances, can stand in preference to the Delegates



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of America assembled in General Congress at Philadelphia."

Mr. Dickinson was also the author of the "Declaration announcing to the World our reasons for taking up arms against England."

We are now approaching the period of the Declaration of Independence. It was becoming apparent that the great object of Samuel Adams (Judas Iscariot, as Edward Tilghman called him) and the New England delegates in Congress was to precipitate open hostilities with England and secure the independence of the colonies. This the delegates from Pennsylvania, led by Dickinson, opposed, and with them, at first, were the delegates from the Southern and Middle colonies generally; but gradually the independence party gained strength until a Declaration of Independence was drafted and proposed. The continued oppression of the New England colonists and the sending of troops to New York strengthened the independence party, but at no time, either before or after the discussion of the proposed Declaration, had they enough votes in Congress to adopt the resolution, until Dickinson, seeing that the sentiment of a majority of the people appeared to be in favor of independence, together with his friend, Robert Morris, afterwards the financier of the Revolution, absented himself from Congress and allowed the vote to be taken. Unlike many of his colleagues who, with him, opposed the measure, he did not stay and vote or afterwards sign the Declaration, but with an honest consistency characteristic of the man and mindful of his

family motto, "to be rather than to seem," he even refused to sit as a figure in the famous picture painted by Trumbull of the "Signing of the Declaration." Giving, as his reason, that he did not sign it, did not at the time approve it, and had no share in the glory of the act of signing it. Dickinson's position in this matter brought upon him the odium of all the advanced revolutionists in the country.

During the severe trial of the long debate in Congress on this vital question, it is worthy of remark that Dickinson, whose views in regard to the inopportune time which had been chosen for a final separation were well known, should have been regarded by his fellow-members with undiminished trust and confidence. Special pains seem to have been taken to meet his objections, which were chiefly twofold,—the want of unity among the colonies, and the want of foreign allies. For over a year before the Declaration, and after that time until the persecutions of his political enemies drove him into retirement, Dickinson, as colonel of the first battalion of the Pennsylvania Associators, a State military organization, was under arms; being among the first to promote the idea of arming to resist British oppression, and, rather than "tame," "spiritless," and "apathetic," as his enemies called him, there are but few who, after studying his career, will not agree with Hildreth, the historian, in thinking that his course with respect to the Declaration exhibited the "noblest proof of moral courage ever shown by a public man in the history of the country."

The public life of Mr. Dickinson was eclipsed, but not extinguished, by the attitude he assumed in regard to the Declaration of Independence.

Through the machinations of his enemies he was forced to resign from the army, and retired into private life on his farm near Dover, in Kent County, Delaware. Immediately, almost, the Delaware Assembly elected him to Congress, November 5, 1776, but he absolutely refused to serve, without assigning a reason. After remaining on his plantation enjoying the cultured friendship of such men as the Ridgeleys and Rodneys in Kent County, Dickinson re-entered the army as a private soldier in Captain Lewis's company of the Delaware militia, and fought through the Brandywine campaign, after which he was commissioned a Brigadier-General by Governor McKean, of Pennsylvania. In 1779 Dickinson was unanimously elected to Congress by Delaware, in 1780 he was elected to the Delaware Assembly from New Castle County, and the same year was elected President of Delaware. In 1782 he was elected President of the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania, therefore being at the same time Governor of Delaware, Governor of Pennsylvania, and member of Congress from Delaware. But times have changed. Pennsylvania no longer has to come to Delaware to borrow a governor. As President of the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania, Dickinson was *ex officio* Chief Justice of the High Court of Appeals, and as such, associated with the Justices of the Supreme Court; he delivered in 1785, among other opinions, one in an important cause,

—viz., Talbot *vs.* The Achilles *et al.,* reported in 1 Dallas, and involving important questions of Admiralty jurisdiction.

Thus this man whom two States vied with each other in honoring was, at the same time, the chief executive officer in them both, the highest judicial officer in one and a member of the highest legislative body in the country from the other, a combination of the legislative, executive, and judicial powers hardly compatible with the Constitution which Dickinson himself subsequently helped to make.

When in September, 1786, in pursuance to the invitation of the Legislature of Virginia, the Commissioners appointed by the various States assembled at Annapolis to devise a method of forming a more perfect union of the colonies, John Dickinson, a Commissioner from Delaware, was chosen president of the meeting. This meeting being ineffective, Dickinson was a delegate from the same State in the convention, subsequently held, which framed the Constitution of the United States. His eminent fitness for this work must have been apparent, bringing as he did to that body a broader knowledge and insight into English constitutional law than any other man on this continent could have done, and being in point of diplomatic and political experience the peer of any member. He took a very prominent position among those early American sages who builded a fabric the enduring utility and symmetrical adaptation of which they could in no sense have conceived of, and, I think we may say, if

they had been spared here for a century and a quarter longer, the apparent elasticity of which would have surprised them.

After the submission of the Constitution to the States for ratification, Dickinson wrote and published a series of essays in the form of nine letters signed *Fabius*, where he appears as an ardent champion of the ratification of the Constitution. These essays did not treat the features of the Constitution in the profound and argumentative manner in which the Federalist did; they were probably designed for a more popular audience, but they had great influence, and did much to secure the ratification of that remarkable instrument.

Politically, Mr. Dickinson became attached to what was known in that day as the Republican party, in this the Democratic party. He was a State's rights man and a warm friend and adviser of Thomas Jefferson. He was, in fact, looked upon generally as one of the political sages of the period, and his advice was often sought in difficult matters. In 1805, during the discussion of the proposed purchase of Louisiana and Florida, the advice of Dickinson was sought by Senator Logan, of Pennsylvania. On the 19th of December Dickinson replies in a letter, a quotation from which perhaps the times justify, as disclosing the writer's feeling upon the question of the acquisition of new territory by the United States. He says,—

"To rush into war at this time for the wilderness beyond the river Mexicano, or on the remote waters of the

Missouri, would be, in my opinion, madness. We want them not. We can hereafter have as much territory as we ought to desire. Nothing is so likely to prevent acquisitions as the seeking of them too eagerly, unreasonably, and contemptuously. In the natural course of things we shall, if wise, gradually become irresistible, and the people will sink into our population. Let us patiently wait for this inevitable progression, and not deprive ourselves of the golden eggs that will be laid for us by destroying in a covetous and cruel frenzy the bird that, if left to itself, will from day to day supply them."

It is natural to suppose that a man who was so deeply indebted to literature as Mr. Dickinson, and whose life had been so sedulously devoted to the application of its inestimable riches to the service of his country, would not, among his many benefactions, overlook education, the mainspring of republican greatness and stability. While President of Pennsylvania, he conceived the idea of establishing a college west of the Susquehanna, then the frontier of the colony. Consequently, with Dr. Benjamin Rush and other friends, he secured the passage of an Act of Assembly incorporating what the Assembly insisted upon naming Dickinson College, "In Memory," as the Act says, "of the great and important services rendered to his Country by his Excellency John Dickinson, Esq." Mr. Dickinson gave to the new college a plantation in Adams County of three hundred acres, and one in Cumberland County of two hundred acres, and all the books saved from the library of his father-in-law,

Isaac Norris, the Speaker, at the burning of Fair-Hill by the British during the Revolution, in all about fifteen hundred volumes.

After the expiration of his term as President of Pennsylvania, Dickinson went back to Delaware to live, and located permanently at Wilmington, where he built a fine mansion at Eighth and Market Streets, upon the site now fittingly occupied by the Wilmington Free Library building. Here, retired from the toil and anxieties of a public life, enjoying an affluent fortune, surrounded by friends who loved him, and by books which, to him, were a constant source of consolation, he spent the concluding years of his life, dispensing among others the blessings which he enjoyed himself, and receiving in return the heartfelt tribute of popular veneration.

He died on the 14th of February, 1808, at the age of seventy-five.

In a life of such manifold and varied activities, it is usually difficult to determine which of its policies and achievements are most characteristic and most important. In the career of Dickinson, however, there appear to be two periods when his most important work was done.

To the successful prosecution of the war of independence the power of the pen was almost as essential as that of the sword. To arouse and sustain a spirit of resistance, to give to the proclamations, addresses, and resolutions of Congress a tone becoming the dignity of that body, and the destiny of the country, and to command the respect and secure the support of the enlightened in

Europe, required genius and cultivation of the highest order and the most commanding influence. In this department of the patriotic contest none surpassed the subject of this paper.

Reference has been made to the fact that almost no students from the New England colonies were entered at the English Inns of Court prior to the Revolution, although all the colonies were governed mainly by the same English common law. The cause of their absence is of course referable to the peculiar circumstances under which the New Englanders left England and to their religious beliefs. To this fact, that the New England lawyers had not the solid training in English law and politics which could at that time be gotten only in England herself, we think, are to be ascribed the difference in the positions maintained by the New England colonies and the other colonies during the pre-Revolutionary controversy.

In Massachusetts, the leading colony in New England, the government was essentially a theocracy up to the time of the Revolution. In New England generally the clergy directed the course of public opinion and of the movement looking to the resistance of the English Parliament. What, then, was their position? They disdained to argue that Parliament and the ministry were exceeding their authority, or that their acts were wholly unjustified by the English theory of colonial law or by the precedents and practice under it; they refused to rest their case upon the allegation that the acts complained of were mere violations of positive written law, or even the provisions

of their own charters; but they conceived their rights to rest upon something above and beyond English law. They claimed that they possessed certain natural rights, founded, as they asserted, on the principles of what was called natural equity. They forgot their own traditions, and, disregarding all their responsibility as members of a civil society, they relied upon what the French afterwards, in their frenzy, called the rights of man. Upon this line, then, the New England colonies acted, desiring from the beginning complete independence. The Middle and Southern colonies, however, led by Dickinson, bounded the horizon of their position by the legal aspects of the situation. They looked at the dispute with Great Britain as mainly a legal question, and that up to the period of the Declaration of Independence it might be settled as any other legal questions were, if not by a judicial tribunal, then by an appeal to legal principles recognized in common by both the mother country and the colonies as the outgrowth of English history and traditions. In extremity, English precedents pointed them to armed resistance, but not to rebellion or separation. They would coerce the mother country by an appeal to law and to reason to yield to the requisitions of freedom and of justice.

John Dickinson then, with his pen and voice, was the champion of constitutional resistance, adapting the brilliant theories of Montesquieu to the conditions of the colonies, tapping all the abundant resources of his wide learning, experience, and splendid intellect to inculcate into the colonists those immortal principles of constitu-

tional liberty and civil freedom that made possible the Constitution of the United States.

This was Dickinson's great pre-Revolutionary work. "For who are a free people?" he asks. "Not those over whom government is reasonably and equitably exercised, but those who live under a government so constitutionally checked and controlled that proper provision is made against its being otherwise exercised." Has there ever been a clearer definition of constitutional rule? And, withal, his contentions were maintained with such unanswerable logical skill and nice discrimination, and his arguments set down in such a matchless classical style, as to attract the attention and win the support of many of the foremost men of Europe.

The other most enduring work of the subject of this sketch was accomplished in the Convention which framed the Constitution of the United States. The most serious controversy in the Convention arose between the delegates of the larger and those of the smaller States in regard to the number of the representatives which should be sent by each to the national Congress, and upon what basis they were to be elected. Various plans were proposed. The large majority of the delegates were evidently in favor of proportional representation, while those from the smaller States, feeling that by the adoption of such a plan they would be crushed or their influence wholly destroyed, refused, even at the risk of losing a national government, to consent to it. In fact, the delegates from Delaware had been instructed to withdraw from the Convention if

any change in the existing rule of suffrage, giving one vote to each State, should be adopted. Mr. Dickinson, as representing Delaware, was foremost in the controversy. His great object was to insure an equal representation of each State in the Senate, thus placing there at least the smaller States on a footing of equality with the larger. The Convention decided unanimously, on the 7th of June, 1787, on the motion of Mr. Dickinson, that the members of that body should be chosen, two for each State, by its Legislature. The enduring usefulness of this novel feature of the Constitution is ample testimony of its wisdom. It needs no eulogy from these pages; its continued influence through an efflux of over a hundred years has established its position as one of the strongest features of that immortal document of which it is a part. If the Senate is the permanent and conservative force in our system, we should not forget, as we are apt to do, to whose influence we are indebted for the introduction into it of this rare invention of state-craft.

Let us refer again, briefly, before bringing this paper to a close, to Dickinson's position with regard to the Declaration of Independence. His name has never been associated with it; nor does it appear that he ever recanted the opinion which he had expressed of its propriety; although he not merely acquiesced in it, but engaged with his accustomed zeal and assiduity in preparing and carrying into effect the measures necessary to sustain it. However much we may regret that his name is not enrolled on that instrument, which is now the pride and boast of

every American, it would not only be uncharitable, but it would be wantonly to dim the lustre of one of the brightest of the Revolutionary luminaries, to suspect the purity of his motives, or to diminish the gratitude of the country to him. The reasons he gave for his position bear testimony to his wise prudence and foresight. He was right in holding that the colonies were not united or prepared, and his policy gave opportunity for the organization of the colonial militia, which scarcely existed at the beginning of the controversy. The soundness of his doctrine of the necessity of foreign alliance was amply vindicated by the effect made upon the struggle by the open espousal of our cause by the French. In fact, the occasion was one in which the righteousness of the cause outweighed the hesitation of prudence, but yet the prudent man cannot be blamed for the policies which his wisdom dictated.

As there was no deficiency of men prepared and anxious to press the Revolutionary car on to its goal, it was fortunate for the country that Congress possessed one man of the peculiar constitution of John Dickinson; for through his instrumentality, whilst they were rushing with a patriotic impetuousness into the midst of a sanguinary revolution, and their country was rapidly bursting its fetters and rising into national existence, their cause was invested with dignity, moderation, and firmness; their motives were exhibited in a condition of purity; and the holy principles of civil liberty, which they were struggling to sustain, were promulgated to the world with a force

and clearness which commanded the respect of the civilized world, and have commended the conflict to the nations of the earth as an example which has been gazed at with admiration.

Mr. Dickinson has been charged with advocating a timid policy, inconsistent with the spirit which became the great cause in which he had embarked, but nothing of the sort appears in his writings. Although he did orally advise Congress to pursue a less daring course than that which was successfully adopted, when he wielded the pen he invariably made Congress speak in a manner that became its dignity, fearlessness, and exalted position, in the presence of the world and of after ages. After the Declaration he supported his associates in the execution of their most energetic measures, and devoted an undivided affection to the cause of his country, no matter by whom or in what manner directed. "Two rules I have laid down for myself throughout this contest," said he on an important occasion in Congress, in 1779, "to which I have constantly adhered, and still design to adhere. First, on all occasions where I am called upon, as a trustee for my countrymen, to deliberate on questions important to their happiness, disdaining all personal advantages to be derived from a suppression of my real sentiments, and defying all dangers to be risked by a declaration of them, openly to avow them; and, secondly, after thus discharging this duty, whenever the public resolutions are taken, to regard them, though opposite to my opinion, as sacred, because they lead to public measures in which the common

weal must be interested, and to join in supporting them as earnestly as if my voice had been given for them. . . . If the present day is too warm for me to be calmly judged, I can credit my country for justice some years hence."

Such was John Dickinson, and I would that we had more public men to-day imbued with so lofty a spirit of patriotism.

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