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pilation of facts, in the introduction to the Letters from the Jarmer he says ; " Sam a farmer, settled, after a vanily of fortunes, on the banks of the now A clauand, in the province of Pennsylvania, Inceived a abral Education; and have bran engaged in the troy seenes of life; but an now convenied, that a man may be as, happy without Justle as with it, My farm is small ; my servants are few and good ! I have a little money at interest ! I wish for no more ; and with a centented, grateful mund, undisturbed by wordly hopes or fears, "neating to my self, I am enjoying the chember of day allow to me by Divine goodness" This is about as good and index as ion have to Dukinsons private life; we could wish for no bitter. But every line of his writings trave withers to the honor, The upsightnes the notleness and the commens of temper which must have desting in whed him, & usins on was destinguated, too, as wall for his intellectual as

for this miral qualities, Some men then and whose any goodness make them the pray of these, mon anming or less serupulour, Durkmen was not one of these, At combined with a moral character bryand reproach, an intellect, a knowledge and an insight into the affairs of men which inabled him to Cope with the keenest minds of hes day. Of how he received his education, little is known it says of hemself: "Being aswally master of my now time, befuld the greater part of it in my hlow which & consider the most odlwable past of my small estate ; and tring acquainted with me or two gantlemen of ability and learning, who have me auch their acquantance, I have I there acquired a greater knowledge of stistory, and the laws and Constitution of my bountry, than is usually actained by men of my class, many of them not having had the portunely to acqui information". That Dermany was presend of oast and

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the arrest question of a perple bing able to goven themselves must be settled by three who should some after; and he knew that the way enable a people to rule themselves was to educate them, And he acted upon hes billef. Who well say that he acted not werely. From the halls of "old Dickinson" have gone firth men who have borne will their part in the struggle of life; men who have had no mean part in shaping he desting of the nation; anen coko have then no dishonor the noble man who was the founder of their alma mater - that man of whom it lan so truly be said, that Che elements were so mixed in him that nature might stand up and say to all the world, This was a man Philosophial Oration Commencement 1883 Frank, G. Graham

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Commencement Oration of Frank G. Graham, Class of 1883 Transcribed by Christine Rosenberry, May 2002 Edited by Don Sailer, September 2009

John Dickinson

It is always a hard matter to condense a comprehensive biography into a ten minute speech. Especially is this the case when the subject is but little known; when, in addition, the author has great faith in his subject, and would fair convince others the task becomes a most difficult one. To prove how powerful a person was John Dickinson in the great drama of the Revolution could require a mas of evidence, which, while conclusive, could not but be tiresome. A very brief glance therefore at his character, as a statesman and as a man is all that can be expected. It seems to be a law of nature that men are affected most by what is most directly presented to them; and Historians are no exception to the rule. The Commander who leads the forlorn hope is a hero, and History sings his praises; but no one if the man who

planned the attack – who saw the opportunity, to others hopeless, and was quick to seize it – the man who was the brain and heart of the movement, but too often fails to receive his reward. The crowd gaze at the puppet show, and stare and admire, and tell others of the wonderful figures, seemingly endowed with life; but no one thinks of the man behind the scenes, who pulled the strings which set the show in motion.

John Dickinson may to a certain degree, be likened to those men who have been the mainsprings of great movements to whom so much is due, yet to whom so little credit is given. Certainly no one occupied a more conspicuous position in the stormy times preceding the declaration of Independence; no one was more instrumental in bringing about the final rapture. It is impossible to read the "Letters from a Farmer" without being

convinced of the great weight they must have had on the feeling and thought of the time. And the "Resolution of Thanks, voted by the Citizens of Boston to the ingenious author of certain patriotic letters, subscribed ' A farmer "Ending with "permit us to intrude upon your privacy and salute the Farmer as the friends of Americans and the common benefactor of mankind" is convincing prose. Nor are there wanting other and many testimonials to the prominence of the position held by Dickinson. It was out of deference to him alone that the second petition to the king, of which he was the author, was consented to. Above all, it was to him alone that Pennsylvania cast her lot [thwith] the other Colonies The preliminary ballot was against the Declaration by a vote of four to three. Dickinson, though personally opposed to it, absented himself from the hall on the final vote, and permitted Pa to cast

her voice for Independence. But it was through no lack of patriotism that Dickinson was opposed to the Declaration. He beleived that the time had not yet come; that in the condition of affairs, at home and abroad, the declaration was simple madness – and looked at in the light of reason, it was madness. In his own words, "It was not till things had deliberately been rendered firm, at home, and abroad that America should advance and assume her position among the nations if the could." But when the Declaration had been signed he was the first to cast his lot with America, organize his regiment and accompany it to the field. And that the people appreciated his motives, and that their confidence in him was unshaken, was shown by his election to the Executive Chair in 1782, after one of the most bitter political contests ever fought in Pennsylvania.

Dickinson, like many great men, fell because he failed to grasp the opportunity when presented to him. Had he espoused the Declaration as actively as he opposed it, his name would have been enrolled with Adams and Jefferson. But he failed to seize the tide at its flood, and its ebb bore him to comparative obscurity. He No one had been more instrumental in firing the train; but he had miscalculated the rapidity of the spark, and the explosion found him unprepared. He was a statesman in everything but state-craft – but another name for state-intrigue. Had he [been?] more of the politician, and less of the statesman, his fame would have been greater. For he was a statesman in so far as he had strong convictions and was willing to abide by their result; he was not a politician for he acted on principle, not expediency. He was too honest to trim his sails, to catch what he firmly believed was only the passing breeze; that it proved

to be the hurricane which surpt the British from the coast was an error of the judgement, not the sympathies; and he dearly paid the penalty by seeing others home to fame in the gale which he had been chiefly instrumental in conjuring. He had helped sow the seed; but rather than cut the grain prematurely, he would let others garner the harvest. And History, forgetting what he did, has passed him by for what he failed to do. Forgetting that he called the people to action, it has neglected him for failing to take advantage of their activity.

But if Dickinsons public life was unfortunate, his private life displayed all those qualities for which he was conspicuous. No one has written a complete biography of Dickinson. But to any one who will read between the lines, his 1 writings collected and published by a Wilmington book firm in 1801 are a more convincing prose than could be any mere com-

pilation of facts. In the introduction to the "Letters from a Farmer" he says: "I am a farmer, settled, after a variety of fortunes, on the banks of the river Delaware, in the Province of Pennsylvania. I received a liberal education, and have been engaged in the busy scenes of life; but am now convinced that a man may be happy without the bustle as with it. My farm is small; my servants are few and good; I have a little money at interest; I wish for no more; and with a contented, grateful mind, undisturbed by wordly hopes or fears, relating to myself, I am enjoying the number of days alloted to me by Divine goodness"

This is about as an index as we have to Dickinsons private life; we could wish for no better. But every lone of his writing bears witness to the honor, the uprightness, the nobleness and the evenness of temper which must have distinguished him.

Dickinson was distinguished, too, as well for his intellectual as

for his moral qualities. Some men there are whose very goodness makes them the prey of others, more cunning or less scrupulous. Dickinson was not one of these. He combined, with a moral

character beyond reproach, an intellect, a knowledge and an insight into the affairs of men which enabled him to cope with the keenest minds of his day. Of how he received his education, little is known; He says of himself: "Being usually master of my own time, I spend the greater part of it in my library, which I consider the most valuable part of my small estate; and being acquainted with one or two gentlemen of ability and learning, who honor me with their acquaintance, I have, I beleive a greater knowledge of History, and the laws and Constitution of my Country, than is usually attained by men of my class, many of them not having had the opportunity to acquire information." That Dickinson was possessed of vast and

accurate knowledge there can be no doubt; every line of his writings shows it. In intellect and culture he was second to none. And it should be a matter of pride to us to day, that the founder of our <u>alma mater</u>, if not the greatest statesman, was at least the greatest scholar of his time. Some men there are, as John Hopkins, who, suddenly becoming possessed of vast wealth and hopeless of any other means of attaining immortality found Colleges or Charitable institutions. Dickinson was not of these men. But it was because he was a man of culture and refinement; because he was an educated man and could appreciate the advantages of an education that he founded the College which now bears his name. He knew that the question of liberty was far from being settled by the surrender of Yorktown. He knew that the crucial test of the Republic was yet to come – he knew that

the [asked?] question of a people being able to govern themselves must be settled by those who should come after; and he knew that the way enable a people to rule themselves was to educate them. And he acted upon his belief. Who will say that he acted not wisely. From the halls of "old Dickinson" have gone forth men who have borne well their part in the struggle of life; men who have had no mean part in shaping the destiny of the nation; men who have been no dishonor the noble man who was the founder of their <u>alma mater</u> – that man of whom it can so truly be said, that the elements were so mixed in him that nature might stand up and say to all the world, this "was the man"

The end. Philosophical Oration Commencement 1883

Frank G. Graham