

DANIEL S. DICKINSON

DANIEL STEVENS DICKINSON, LL.D., American senator and lawyer, was born at Goshen, Conn., Sept. 11, 1800, and died at New York city, April 12, 1866. After obtaining but a rudimentary education, supplemented later by private reading, he studied law and was admitted to the Bar in 1828, beginning the practice of his profession at Guilford, N. Y. Removing to Binghamton, N. Y., in 1831, he made that town thereafter his home. In 1836, he entered the New York Senate as a Democratic member, and was speedily an acknowledged leader among his political associates, one of his most noted speeches at this period being delivered in 1837, in opposition to the repeal of the usury laws. He served one term in Congress as senator, 1841-50, and for a while was chairman of the Senate finance committee. His course as senator was conservative in character, and he spoke frequently on such important questions as the Mexican War, the Wilmot Proviso, and other issues of the period. He returned to the practice of his profession at Binghamton at the close of his term in Congress, and after the opening of the Civil War exerted all his influence, which was great, in arousing Union sentiment, regardless of party ties, devoting the larger part of his time for some years to the delivery of patriotic addresses in New England and the Middle States. In 1861, he was elected attorney-general of New York, and during the closing year of his life was United States district attorney for the southern district of New York. Dickinson was a lucid and logical debater, and spoke with little apparent effort. His speeches abound in classical allusions and not infrequently are seasoned with satire. His "Life and Works," edited by his brother, appeared at New York in 1867. Extracts from his patriotic speeches on the Union abound in school readers and collections of oratory.

SPEECH AT WAR RATIFICATION MEETING

DELIVERED AT COOPER INSTITUTE, NEW YORK, OCTOBER 8, 1862

I HAVE no new light upon the subject of this rebellion or the manner in which it should be treated. I stand to-day where I stood when Sumter fell—determined to see my country's flag vindicated—to see the supremacy of the constitution established and upheld—to see sovereign law acknowledged—to see rebellion crushed—to act with those, and those only, who would go all lengths to break it down—to act against all who would be its defenders or apologists—to act with those who, in pursuing rebellion, would stop only

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at the outposts of civilization and Christianity in efforts to destroy it—to employ every means, moral and material, known to man to cut it up and to put it down the most effectually, and at the earliest moment. I devoted seven of the best years of my life in efforts for the settlement of this accursed question peaceably—that it might be taken out of the political field North and South and be let alone to work out its own peculiar problem under the mysterious dispensation of a guiding and beneficent Providence. Now that it is unnecessarily made the pretext for a wicked and causeless rebellion by the southern people, I care not how soon I see its end. With no abolition proclivities, in a political sense, but the reverse, I would not have gone out of my way to look upon slavery in this conflict or to avoid slavery, but would have treated it like any other element, taking it when it would give us strength or weaken them, and employed it accordingly. I have never seen a moment since the outbreak when I would have touched the institution for itself alone, nor when I would not have cut it from its moorings in one hour if it would have aided in disposing of the rebellion, and I would do the same now. I hold the war power broad enough to cover the whole question, and I confess, in a time when our government is trembling in the balance before the world, I like to see it exercised when it is well and boldly and thoroughly done.

Let those who take the sword perish with the sword is my doctrine, and let those who raise a rebellious army against the constitution take just such aid and comfort as martial law and the war power in their utmost rigor mete out to them, whether it be hemp or steel or lead or a confiscation of property. If slaves are property they are subject to the same rules as other property and should be treated accord-

ingly. There is no charm upon the subject and should be no mystification over it. I early saw that rebellion, if long continued, would end in emancipation—that from a necessity emancipation was to enter into the question, for as the rebellion progressed and declined and was on its last legs, it would at the last moment liberate the slaves in its desperation, if events had not sooner practically done so, or emancipation had not then been proclaimed by the federal government. I would have preferred practical and real acts in the premises as occasions demanded, under martial law as such, to theories or paper proclamations, for I hold the war power abundant and legislation unnecessary; but the President having determined upon a proclamation, I would have preferred to see how it would work in the last few months of the old year, to the first day of the new. But, if the proclamation weakens rebellion and strengthens government—as I hope and believe it will—I am for it and all its consequences, and any and every other measure which will conduce to that end. The institution has been overworked, and can no longer form political capital on either side, of which politicians of both shades will please take notice. It is to pass away during the present struggle, especially if long continued, and as an element of mischief and disturbance, and as a just retribution to those who have taken up arms against the government in its name for vile political ends, it has my permission to start at the earliest moment possible and to make the exodus a complete one. One such government is worth all the slavery that has existed since Joseph was sold into Egypt. If rebellion wishes to avoid these results and to invoke the constitution, let it acknowledge its supremacy, embrace the olive branch extended by the President, and lay down its arms and close its work of treason and murder. The cry that

released contrabands are coming North is for political effect and to secure votes from alarmed laborers. When slavery is no longer recognized in the southern States the colored race will not struggle for the cold North to compete with our laborers, but those now with us will seek a more congenial clime in the sunny South where the climate is more agreeable and the labor and productions better suited to their wants and tastes and habits. . . .

It is idle, my friends, to prosecute this war against rebellion by halves. It is worse than idle to send our sons to the field of blood and leave politicians at home who are denouncing government, apologizing for rebellion, and are inculcating, no matter how stealthily or covertly, cowardly and fatal propositions of peace. Rebellion knows, from spies and sympathizers quite too near us, what is going on in our midst as well as we do. It is struggling on in the hope that this peace party may gain the ascendancy, when it expects to be forgiven for its treason, have murder washed from its bloody hands, and be rewarded for its villainy by liberal propositions. This party, with its propositions of peace, having been exposed, abashed, and ingloriously overthrown last year, has covered its framework thus, with a veneering of a different shade but quite too flimsy to deceive a discerning and loyal people. Like the cat in the fable, it has whitewashed its coat, but the teeth and claws are plainly discernible. Call back your sons, I repeat, or crush this insidious monster at home and the rebellion abroad together. Rebellion has lost faith in expected foreign recognition. Its miserable sympathizers in England lack courage to come to time. Even Disraeli, who, O'Connell said, was a regular lineal descendant of the hardened thief, fails to meet the occasion as expected. Its hope now rests in the aid and sympathy it can command in the loyal

States, to save it from the condign punishment and ignoble end which awaits it, and looks more to the success of this ticket to-day than to the exploits of Stonewall Jackson. Call back your sons, I say again, or crush this political hope of rebellion at home. When this hideous monster sees us united as one man, in one common purpose, to crush it, it will yield; but until then it will struggle on, like the writhings of a venomous serpent, till exterminated. It would long since have yielded but for hope of propositions of peace from political quarters and terms of accommodation; and but for seeing the executive denounced for unconstitutional acts, and a party rising up opposing the war in effect if not in name—for rebel leaders understand the matter in all its bearings.

Alas! how many brave spirits have been quenched forever because of this shameful, sinful division—by reason of this miserable political ambition to raise up a successful party at home to gain office and spoils. But God will bring its actors to judgment. Every household has been bereaved.

“There is no flock, however watched or tended,
But one dead lamb is there;
There is no fireside, howsoever defended,
But has one vacant chair.

“The air is full of farewells to the dying,
And mournings for the dead:
The heart of Rachel, for her children crying,
Will not be comforted.”

Our fair-haired boys perilled their lives in endeavoring to crush a rebellion which gains hope, and tenacity, and endurance, and perseverance, in its work of conspiracy and treason and murder, and holds on because it sees a peace-war party rising up stealthily and in disguise among us at home. Their bones are bleaching upon every battlefield in the rebel States. Those who loved them ask you where they are! You cannot raise the dead; but, in the name of heaven, call back the

living that are yet spared to us, or destroy at one blow one of the chief hopes of rebellion at home,—a political organization to which rebellion instinctively turns for relief. But yesterday a proud boy in the heyday of life and hope fell. He was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; he fell by the hand of a rebel murderer, nerved on by the hope that political divisions in the loyal States would give rebellion aid and comfort and propositions of peace. She asks you with trembling lip and tearful eye for the idol of her heart, her hope and joy. May he who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb protect her! You cannot restore her child, but you can destroy one of the accursed causes which protract this bloody and terrible war,—the politicians' hope. The storms of autumn beat upon the log-cabin standing by the little brook beyond the hills. The winds moan, and the leaves rustle, and night is gathering. A woman weeps over a hearth, cold and cheerless, and desolate. A group of little children, with curious, anxious faces, hang upon her knee wondering why she weeps, and are asking for their father.

“Alas!
Nor wife, nor children, more shall he behold;
Nor friends, nor sacred home.”

He fills an unknown bloody grave in the land of rebellion, where he marched to aid in preserving the inheritance of his revolutionary sire. But he was murdered in expectation of propositions of peace from politicians, who fear rebellion will not be constitutionally treated, or in the hope of some new reading of the constitution which would exempt rebellion from censure and punishment. That bereaved widow in her destitution looks to you. Those children “demand their sire with tears of artless innocence.” You cannot restore him. God alone can shield and comfort the widow and the father-

less. But you can remove one of the chief causes which serves to protract this hellish malignity and mischief at the ballot-box. You can cancel the demands of hungry politicians. A settler in the far West upon the Indian border has volunteered, with the true spirit of the pioneer, to defend his country's flag. His wife and children are aroused from their slumbers at midnight by the yells of savage hell-hounds, to perish by the tomahawk and scalping-knife; the cabin is in flames, and the ferocious monsters, with hands dripping with the blood of innocence, bear away their trophies to exhibit for reward to more ferocious monsters still—savages professing Christianity—conspirators and rebels who stimulate the red man to murder defenceless women and children that they may procure from political traders at an early moment liberal propositions of peace and compromise. That borderer will return to greet his loved ones, but they are not there. A heap of ashes is all that is left him; tears roll copiously down his sunburnt visage, but, like the fallow-deer, he weeps alone. You cannot bring back to his embrace the beloved object of his affection, but by precept and example you can aid in removing the detestable hope that a political party can succeed in whole or in part in sympathy with rebellion.

Let, then, I say, the people of the loyal States be united—let them act together as one man. Let no political organization, as such, be supported or encouraged or tolerated; but let all lovers of their country and its institutions meet for public action and effort in a common union. Let rebellion in all its protean forms and all its elements be crushed by every hand and cursed by every lip, in its moral or material forces, in the egg or in the serpent, open or disguised, in its full strength or diluted, in the field or in the political canvass, in battles of blood or at the polls, at home or abroad. This

is demanded in the name of revolutionary memories, in the name of liberty and the rights of man, in the sacred name of humanity and religion, in the name of fathers whose sons have been slain, of widows whose husbands have been murdered, or mothers who have been bereaved of their children, of children who have been robbed of those to whom Providence taught them to look for protection, of society which mourns the destruction of its members, of the dead whose blood has been shed to preserve our government from shame, our land from desecration, our homes from the torch—in the name of justice, truth, and peace, and of man's last best hope beneath the skies. Rebellion is doomed; its last hope is in political aid by home divisions. Destroy this hope, and our government shall never die.