The House on Jones Neck

THE DICKINSON MANSION

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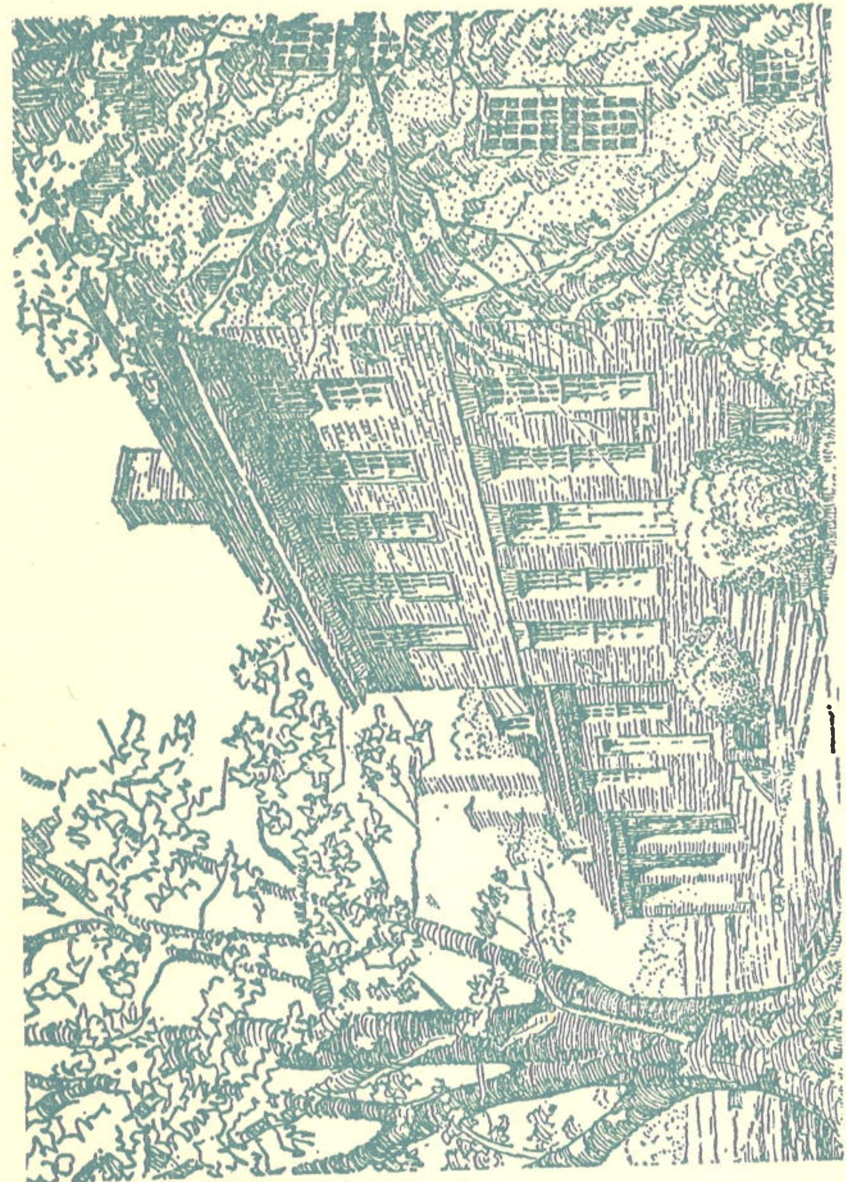

VIEW OF DICKINSON MANSION FOLLOWING RESTORATION
—Sketch by Albert Kruse

THE HOUSE ON JONES NECK

By J. H. POWELL, PH. D.

IN THE VERY HEART of the Kent County flatlands, five miles down St. Jones River below Dover, stands the Dickinson Mansion. It is an old house, as we measure age in America, for it is well into its third century. And it is a handsome place, with all the calm, neat dignity, the balanced elegance and poise of the Georgian period to which it belongs.

No high point rises in the landscape hereabouts, no pedestal from which to take a long view. But such prospect over the flatlands as the streambank offers, this house commands. It is perfectly placed, the home of a land-owner who would survey his fields and his stock. And it is perfectly designed to fit on its site.

Once there was a river-landing here, and wharves. Once this house was the center of a great agricultural enterprise, and Delaware shallops plied up and down the St. Jones, bringing Philadelphia goods to the Dickinsons, taking cargoes of wheat and corn in return. This was in the amphibious age of America, an age long gone. But through the years of decay the house has stood, as solidly as it stood in the years of its brisk, bustling greatness. In and around its walls, the processes of birth and death, the flush of life and the annual repetitions of nature's cycle have endlessly flowed. Nothing in the changes of the generations has had more permanence than this strong facade men's hands have shaped.

For this house is Delaware history in brick and mortar. Roaming these fields, the visitor is brought to think of that ancient struggle of Lord Baltimore to seize the Delaware bayside from the Duke of York, later from William Penn; the fine Mansion itself evokes the stable world of George II, when the British Empire was at its zenith; and the rank marsh rushes growing in the sandy bottom suggest another American picture, for these grasses were gathered every year in the 1880's and 1890's, and sold to the traction companies of Philadelphia, who strewed them on the floors of horse cars to keep the feet of the passengers warm.

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Scenes of this house are peaceful scenes — the turkey buzzards sunning and marsh herons postured in a pool, scenes of tillage and husbandry, of trade in good season and bad, the episodes of the farmer's year. But there have been touching moments, too — the return of the young John Dickinson from his studies in England, that return his father had feared he would never see; and moments of violence, such as the great fire, or the time the Tories sacked the house in the midst of the Revolution. Two hundred years is a long, long time.

The fame of this house is John Dickinson's fame. Here he was raised from his eighth to his eighteenth year, here he began his public career in the busy matters of men and measures, here was always throughout his life the very core of his landed fortune. "My plantation in Kent," Dickinson called it, "my house on Jones Neck." Even after his removal to Philadelphia, he would interrupt his strenuous life for regular spring and fall visits here; his correspondence was full of the management of his great estate; Jones Neck was his healing, refreshing root in the soil.

Someone once said of John Dickinson, the "Penman of the Revolution," that it was he who "first opened the Eyes of Americans to see their Rights and contend for them." He was spokesman for all the colonies during the Stamp Act year. His pamphlets organized American opposition, and defined the cause of resistance to British measures. Then he propounded his original theories of empire in his "Farmer's Letters," after the Townshend Acts; the "Farmer's Letters" was his greatest work, a major event in the history of the American mind. All the rest of his life, Dickinson was popularly called "The Farmer." He dominated the First and Second Continental Congresses, was the voice of lawful and orderly resistance. Then, because his way was the middle way, he opposed independence in 1776, and by this stand lost his popularity. Slowly he regained it — as a colonel in the field with Pennsylvania troops, as a private in the Delaware militia, as brigadier general in Delaware, as a congressman from this state and from Pennsylvania, as President of Delaware, then President of Pennsylvania; as a leading member of the Constitutional Convention of 1787, and defender of the new government, as a principal author of the new constitution of Delaware of 1792, as a Jeffersonian republican, and elder statesman of the Revolutionary generation.

Though he was born in Maryland, and spent most of his time for thirty years in Pennsylvania, Delaware was his first constituency, and his last; "my affection and gratitude to this State," he wrote, "I never will

resign but with my life." Dickinson was many things in his time — assemblyman, lawyer, judge, statesman, pamphleteer, philanthropist, religious enthusiast. But always he remained what his father had made him, one of America's largest, busiest, richest landowners. This house on Jones Neck was his seat.

"With Delight," he wrote once, "I recall, I dwell upon those chearful happy Scenes I have spent with my Honourd Parents: Like Roses, they Preserve their Sweetness, tho faded, and entertain in Idea, as they once diverted in Reality. Tho past, they are not forgot, & as long as they are remembred, they will be pleasing."

The story of this Mansion begins long before John Dickinson. It is his father Samuel's story, and it involves elements dim in John's background, which shaped his heritage and his character, but which were far removed from the life of the "Pennsylvania Farmer" himself. Kent County history cannot start in Jones Neck. Neither can the story of this Mansion.

It is a great thing in a man's life when he builds a house. Samuel Dickinson, rich landowner though he was, in all his seventy years built only one, this one. It is with Samuel Dickinson the visitor on Jones Neck must begin — begin that day long ago when, after a hard overland journey of more than seventy miles the Maryland planter and lawyer opened the big Family Bible he kept his records in, and wrote a laconic sentence:

> "I and my wife and Children Came up to my Plantation in Kent to live this 18th Day of January 1740 Old Stile which is the 29th Day of January 1741 New Stile."

It was Samuel Dickinson who planned that this house should be his dwelling place, and the seat of his family forever.

Now all kinds of Americans people our past — the sea captain, the pioneer, the Indian scout, the inventor, the lawyer in court and assembly, the explorer alone on the vast flat prairie. America offers a rich host of images to the imagination. But Samuel Dickinson's world was a firm, secure world, fixed in its terms and surely permanent. He was born as William and Mary ascended their troubled thrones; he died the year young George III became king. His life spanned the stable Hanoverian period, in the stable parts of colonial America — spanned its victories, its prosperity, its *Pax Britannica*. Samuel Dickinson conquered no wilderness, he only conquered himself. He made a good, rich life, and in his prosperity prepared the same future for his children. It was not in his dreams that their world should cast all that stability aside, abandon the house he had built on his land, as well as the house he had built in his heart.

When he came up to his plantation in Kent, he was already fifty-two years old, already a successful man of great wealth. He thought he knew what he was doing. He thought he was converting his wealth from tobacco to wheat, playing the best of both markets, and assisting himself by moving closer to his entrepot, Philadelphia. He was also pleasing his wife. His fifty-two years had been a careful preparation. Samuel Dickinson was not the sort of man whom life takes unawares. To him, America was already an old, long-lived-in place, an environment he had mastered. He was, after all, the third Dickinson to dwell in these provinces.

He had never seen his grandfather, the first Dickinson, who died eight years before he was born. One time Samuel entered in his great Bible all he knew of Walter, in one sentence: he "Came Into Virginia and Marryed a Wife named Jane." This Walter did indeed do, when he was past thirty years old, and he moved twice more — to Anne Arundel County in Maryland, and then finally to the banks of the Choptank on the Eastern Shore, near the village of Trappe in Talbot County, where he purchased four hundred acres of land and built a great house which he called "Crosiadore" — which is to say, Cross of Gold. The house was a typical Maryland cross house, the gold was the Orinoco leaf tobacco. There three generations of Dickinsons were born; there the plantation is today in the hands of a Dickinson descendant.

Walter Dickinson harvested his dusty yellow gold with energy and success. He was no friend to the Lord Proprietor, he took part in uprisings against him, but still he played My Lord Baltimore's game in one respect, for in September, 1676, he purchased two farms clear across the peninsula on the Delaware Bay — eight hundred acres in lands Lord Baltimore claimed but which Charles II had also granted to the Duke of York. This was the start of the Jones Neck patrimony in the Dickinson family.

Baltimore subsidized migration thither, hoping that squatters under his patents would fill the Delaware land and buttress his claims. He did so more earnestly after 1682, when William Penn received a charter to the Delaware coast. It is a fascinating story, this vendetta of squatters and patents by which Baltimore sought to vitiate Penn's charter. Walter Dickinson was part of it. But in 1685 the Lords of Trade ruled against Baltimore, and thereby Walter Dickinson's lands came to lie in two separate provinces, Maryland and Delaware. They also came to lie in two separate families, for when Walter died in March, 1681, he left "Crosiadore" to his oldest son William, the Delaware lands to his youngest son Walter. Between these brothers there was little correspondence, and few if any visits. They went their various ways. Walter farmed on Jones Neck with some success, while in Maryland William, the second Dickinson, became a man of property and substance.

William was twenty-two when he inherited "Crosiadore" and its four hundred acres. He married Elizabeth Powell, who was quite a person in her own right. Daughter of the Quaker leader, Howell Powell, in whose Talbot County home George Fox had conducted his first American meeting of the Society of Friends, Elizabeth was also niece to Governor Lovelace of New York, and niece likewise to the Cavalier poet Richard Lovelace, who wrote "stone walls do not a prison make nor iron bars a cage." The poet wrote completely un-Quaker lyrics to be the uncle of this very Quaker lady, who brought the Dickinsons into the Friendly persuasion. She and William became overseers of the Quarterly Meeting, and were much in its affairs. The heritage of poetry ran thin for several generations, but not the Friendly birthright. It was a strong, sometimes a controversial part of the Dickinsons' lives.

William lived until 1717, and the span of his life covered the revolution in Maryland agriculture at the turn of the century caused by the introduction of the Negro slave. Riding on the crest of this wave of new labor, William multiplied his landholdings six times. He started with "Crosiadore's" four hundred acres; he died with 2,500 acres scattered in five separate farms in three Maryland counties, which he reached from his wharf in his own boats. For he was also a merchant, selling goods to his tenants and sending his tobacco to his London Quaker factors. William, the second Dickinson, belonged to the first generation of Maryland capitalists.

To William and Elizabeth Powell Dickinson three children were given, but only one survived. He was Samuel, who was born in the tiny, cell-like room half-way up the main staircase at "Croisiadore," at three in the morning of Sunday, March 9, 1689. His boyhood was spent at lovely "Crosiadore," where the broad Choptank lay shimmering before the mansion house, already in his time an old place. He grew up in the water-bound culture of Talbot County, he read the Quaker books of Grandfather Powell and learned the business of managing a tobacco estate from his father. When he was old enough he was sent for a year to London, to meet the Quaker tobacco factors, the Hanburys and the Barclays, and to read a bit of law at the Middle Temple.

Back in Maryland, he married, on January 4, 1711, when he was twenty-two. His bride was Judith Troth, daughter of a neighboring Quaker planter. Nearly ninety years later a James Troth was clerk of the Third Haven Quarterly Meeting when John Dickinson wrote there seeking information about his father's first marriage. Bride and groom settled at "Crosiadore," and there Samuel Dickinson was to remain for the next thirty years.

It was a busy, bustling career, the life of a tobacco planter. Every year, ships called at Town Point wharf to take the year's crop to England, every voyage back they brought goods from England to be sold. And there were quit-rents to be paid, and taxes in every county, and elections to attend and First-Day and Monthly and Quarterly Meetings and all the social occasions of the prosperous Chesapeake community, where Dickinsons and Goldsboroughs and Powells and Gorsuchs, Tilghmans and Chews and a dozen other great families were intermarried and interconnected and hard at work making their yellow-leaf fortunes. Samuel Dickinson was at the heart of a vigorous, lively society. He practiced law in the courts, he helped his father in business, he sailed here and there looking for new lands and good buys.

Children came quickly: a son he named William for his father, a son Walter for his grandfather, or perhaps for that uncle over on the Delaware lands, a son Samuel; then on Saturday, March 8, 1717, the day before his twenty-eighth birthday, Judith went up again to the stair-landing room and was delivered of a frail little daughter, called Elizabeth for her grandmother. Later that night, actually at the very hour of the twenty-eighth anniversary of his own birth, Samuel watched his father die. And six days later the infant Elizabeth expired. Samuel's tragedies had begun.

So had his prosperity. At twenty-eight, he became a man of wealth. He inherited the 2,500 acres, and the Quakers made him and Judith "Visitors and Overseers" in the place of his father, William. Two more children, Henry born in 1719 and Elizabeth in 1721, brought his family to four sons and a daughter. With this spur, he began to expand his estate.

Just as William before him had flourished with the new labor supply, so Samuel Dickinson in his day took advantage of the drop in tobacco to buy up distressed land, new land, parcelled land — any land he could find to increase his production. He fairly collected plantations —

"Hobson's Choice," for "30 pounds lawful money of this Province," "Homestead" for 11,000 pounds of tobacco, "Readly" for perhaps fifty thousand pounds of the leaf. These were in Maryland. And at the same time, apparently sensing the collapse that was coming in tobacco, he reached over into Delaware, made several journeys there and began to buy parcels of wheat lands near his uncle Walter on Jones Neck. Some of his Maryland neighbors still held patents from the earliest purchases here, which after the Lords' of Trade ruling in 1685 they had not developed. Samuel bought them: four hundred acres on St. Jones River from Jacob Gray of Dorset for thirty pounds lawful money of Maryland — this was the largest piece, and it was under an old Baltimore patent to a certain Thomas Young. In two years Dickinson bought the rest of Young's grant.

In 1723 came his seventh child, Rebecca; in 1725 another daughter named Rachel, who lived only four months; her name was given to a ninth child born in 1727. By his fortieth birthday, Samuel had four sons and three daughters, he had doubled his Maryland patrimony, and acquired a large holding in Delaware. He and Judith had been married eighteen years; he was a fixture in Talbot County affairs.

He sent his three sons, William (18), Walter (16), and Samuel (14) to England to be educated. But his fortieth year was disastrous to Samuel Dickinson. In September, 1728, his sons Walter and Samuel died of the small-pox in London, and the next August the miasmas of the Choptank marshes took a frightful toll. In a single week his youngest child, Rachel, aged two, his daughter Rebecca, six, and his wife Judith all died. Suddenly, Dickinson of "Crosiadore" was left with only three children — Henry, ten, Elizabeth, eight, and William in England. Soon news came of William's death, also.

In his sorrow, Samuel Dickinson purchased more land. A fortnight after Judith died he bought "White Phillips" in Talbot; next year he was up in Queen Anne acquiring "Poplar Ridge" and looking for others.

At forty-two, Samuel Dickinson started life all over again. He was a good match, this wealthy widower. "Crosiadore" needed a mistress, the children needed a mother. Probably his Delaware lands had furnished occasions for visits to Philadelphia; at any rate some good fortune brought him to the notice of Mary, the eldest daughter of the Philadelphia Quaker merchant John Cadwalader.

Now Mary Cadwalader was a spinster of thirty-one, far beyond the usual age for marriage. Of her a friend said, in one of those phrases polite people used for ladies no longer exciting, that she was "a distinguished woman, of fine understanding and graceful manner." It is a cold phrase, that tells all too clearly Mary's limitations. Beautiful, she was not. But Samuel Dickinson found her strong mind, her piety, her fine dignity and her excellent connections exactly what he wanted. A year and a half after Judith's death, he had a "certificate of his clearness relative to Marriage" directed by the Third Haven Monthly Meeting "to Friends in Philadelphia in order to proceed in marriage with a member of their meeting," and in another six months the plain Friendly service was solemnized. On November 28, 1731, the Monthly Meeting of Philadelphia wrote "to Friends in Maryland — Tred Haven Monthly Meeting" recommending the new Mrs. Samuel Dickinson:

> "She being Born and Educated amongst us, and We (besides our own Knowledge) having made the Usuall Enquiry, Do Certifie that She our Said friend Mary Cadwallider now Dickinson hath behav'd Orderly and Reputably, and has our Esteem & Love as one in Unity with us. We desire her continuance and Growth in the Way of Truth, and her prosperity and Comfort in all respects: Saluting you our beloved friends, in that Love which is our Bond and safety . . . "

Now Mary Cadwalader Dickinson, like Samuel's mother Elizabeth Powell, was a Welsh Quaker. Her grandmother was an Evans, her mother a Jones, her sister married a Morris, her great-aunt a Roberts, her niece a Meredith. And she came from the busy, prosperous society of Philadelphia Welsh Quakers. Her brother Thomas had just returned from medical studies at Rheims (he was the first Philadelphian to earn a continental medical degree) and a year's surgical training in a London hospital. Dr. Thomas Cadwalader was to become a famous physician, the first American medical author (his book was *An Essay on the West-India Dry-Gripes*), the first to use electricity in medicine, a notable teacher, a founder of libraries, a great man. "Uncle Cadwalader" was to give John Dickinson direction, guidance, and part of the shape of his life.

A man of forty-two, a woman of thirty-one, make a special kind of life for themselves when they marry. There is no doubt that Mary Dickinson came to adore her vigorous husband, but neither is there any doubt that she regarded every day she spent away from Philadelphia as a hard

and undeserved exile. Maryland was a distant place, and "Crosiadore" a quiet retreat after the lively pursuits of the city.

The marriage was immediately fruitful. At "Crosiadore," just a year after she came to it, Mary climbed up to that tiny chamber where Judith had spent so many labors, and on a winter's night — again, Samuel noted, "at 3 in the morning" — gave birth to a boy, who was given the name of his Cadwalader grandfather, John. Samuel entered the date in his Bible as November 2, 1732, using the old style; John Dickinson himself always added the eleven days of the reformed calendar, and called the thirteenth of November his birthday.

Two other sons were born to Samuel and Mary Dickinson, the second, Thomas, on "4 Oct 4 a m 1734;" the third, Philemon, on "5 April 10:30 p m 1739." The sole record of Thomas' life is that "He died young," but Philemon was to grow to manhood, wealth, political prominence and a general's commission in New Jersey.

Now it may be that young Henry had little taste for a pious, gentle stepmother from the city; at any rate in later years John avoided his stepbrother, and on one occasion at least did not even ride a short mile to see him when he was in the neighborhood. And it may be that the older boy, as he reached twenty in 1739, resented the young sons who bid fair to share his patrimony. Certainly Mary, for her part, wanted to be closer home — she never learned that the word *home* could have more than the one meaning, Philadelphia. Samuel Dickinson, after his second marriage, traveled more and more often over to Kent. With Henry and Betsy nearly grown, but his new family just starting, the busy planter had two separate problems to solve as the founder of a dynasty. He had to reach outward again, and in the years after John was born, he was already preparing for a move.

To accomplish his purpose, Samuel suddenly bought vastly more lands in Maryland and Delaware both, and in his purchases his design was evident — to give Henry and Betsy the tobacco fortune of Maryland, to provide John and Philemon, the children of his older age, with the wheat lands of Delaware, on which he himself would live out his days. He consolidated all his Maryland lands into three large blocs, along three of the great rivers. The total of them amounted to more than 9,000 acres — fourteen square miles of tobacco plantations.

In Delaware he sought to build a single great plantation. Ordinarily, it would have been a long, slow operation, but in 1739 an unexpected

episode accelerated the sober planter's design, moved him to anger and brought his plans to a sudden crisis. That year, his eighteen-year-old daughter Betsy married Charles Goldsborough, son of "Crosiadore's" nearest neighbor. The Goldsboroughs were prosperous planters, and Charles was a perfect match for Samuel's daughter to make; but he was not a Quaker, nor could he win approval of the Friends. A great deal of unpleasantness resulted. The Third Haven Quarterly Meeting in June, 1739, entered a minute on their books:

> "1739, 6 mo This mg having under Consideration of the Disorderly marriage of Elizabeth the daughter of Sam'l Dickinson & of his Concession thereto after the refusal by the Quarterly meeting of their passing amongst friends — this mg refers the Consideration thereof to our next Quarterly mg Either for Result or advice."

Ultimately, Samuel was not disowned, but a cloud was cast over his fellowship with the Friends which made a considerable difference in John Dickinson's history, accounting for the fact that not until he was past fifty-five did he become active in the Society which had done so much to fashion his intellectual and moral heritage. When Samuel took his family to Delaware, no letter from Third Haven Meeting commending him to Friends in Kent went along. Not even the prestige of his mother Elizabeth Powell's connection with the first establishment of Friends in Talbot County could persuade the conservative, pietistic, orthodox stiffbacks on the Choptank to overlook Samuel's having consented to a "disorderly" marriage.

Mary Dickinson was shocked, Samuel was angry. As if in defiance, he endowed his daughter Betsy with a dowry in lands which he considered so much more than adequate that he gave nothing additional to her only child in his will — poor Betsy survived her disputed wedlock less than ten years. And Samuel Dickinson, despite his wife's pious urgings, would never again go in Meeting.

With Henry and Betsy both married (however the Friends felt about it) and with his 9,000 acres of Maryland lands organized as an enormous but efficient producing institution, Samuel could feel that his first family was settled, and his job on the Chesapeake done. He had already built his Delaware mansion; finally in 1741 he made his move.

At "Crosiadore" his grandfather had established himself; at "Crosiadore" his father and mother had lived and died. There he had been born

and raised, there he had buried his wife and four of his daughters, there he had known his successes and endured his sorrows. On the morning of the day he left his old home forever, he was moved by an obscure impulse. He opened his Family Bible and on a blank page drew a chart showing his two marriages and his twelve children. After each name he placed the date of birth,and such brief history as there was to write. Beneath it he added,

> "All the above sd Children were born unto me on my Land at or near Crosia Dore Creek in Talbott County witness my hand this 18th day of January 1740 — Samuel Dickinson"

To come from the busy rivers of Maryland lined with their stately mansions and served by their frequent ocean-going ships, to the rural quiet of Jones Neck, was to step from a life of many people and interests into a life almost of isolation. Mary Dickinson may have enjoyed being only two days' journey from Philadelphia; little John, at eight, could scarcely have cared. But for Samuel Dickinson, Kent County was a hard change in his life. He was leaving a large part of his world behind.

The Barons of Baltimore had not willingly acquiesced in the ruling of the Lords of Trade in 1685. They continued to push their claims to Delaware lands, and it was under Baltimore grants that Samuel Dickinson had purchased in Delaware — at prices lower than the Penns would offer their lands for, but at the risk of ultimate dispossession by the courts. As early as 1724 he had acquired a good many acres, in scattered pieces. It was a gamble — and then the gamble paid off, for in London an agreement was reached confirming all existing grants of both Baltimore and Penn, and estopping further patents. This was a victory for Baltimore, though he was never fully satisfied. For Samuel Dickinson it was more than a victory, it was security. By this agreement, he and all other Marylanders settling in The Three Lower Counties were vested in their lands. Now it was, that he bought the Thomas Young patent from Jacob Gray, and in the 1730's he plunged.

From his numerous purchases, he welded together an estate of upwards of 3,000 acres — a dozen farms and tenements stretching up St. Jones River from the bayside clear to Dover. Some were Baltimore patents, a few were originally Penn; every deed was in dispute somehow. Samuel Dickinson thrust himself into the midst of a long and difficult legal process of quieting titles in this disputed area. One farm, "Poplar

Neck," had been the first English grant in the Jones Neck region. Another, "Burton's Delight," had been sold long before to the illiterate John Burton (he made his mark) by "Christian, the Indian, otherwise Pettetoque, Lord of all the Land, Between St. Jones and Duck Creek," for three "Match Coats," four "double hands full of Powder and so much Shoot," and three bottles of "Indian Drink." A third had been the most important early settlement in Dover Hundred, "Towne Point," laid out by the Dutch surveyor of Whorekill, Verhoofe, for one Edward Pack — in whose house the first court for Kent County had been held. A later owner maintained a public house and a ferry across the bay to Jersey at Town Point Wharf.

The largest single holding Samuel acquired included the eight hundred acres his grandfather Walter Dickinson had taken up back in the 1670's. On this land his uncle, son of the first Walter Dickinson, had lived, and he had added four hundred acres to his inheritance. His son, also called Walter, Samuel's first cousin, had inherited the estate. This Walter was no capitalist proprietor like his wealthy Maryland cousin. He was a simple artisan, a carpenter, who had very little use for two square miles of marshlands, fields, and woods for which he could supply neither labor nor tools. In 1732 Samuel sold cousin Walter a smaller farm of two hundred acres for ten pounds, and then bought in exchange for fifty pounds all the rest of his patrimony: "Mulbury Swamp alious Merritts Land . . . part of a Tractt of Land Adioyning thereto Called Whartons . . . Extending a Mile into the Woods North East . . . allso one other Tract of Land Adioyning on the uper Side of the Mulbery Swamp Called Shrusebury . . . in all three parcels of one thousand acres of Land Lying and being in Kent County on Dillaware . . ."

Maryland patents for separate pieces of this land had conflicted with Penn patents, and though titles of all holders under either had been confirmed in 1724, there were endless lawsuits which were still continuing as late as 1760 when Samuel died. He had need of all his legal knowledge. He bought as many rights as he could: Thomas Penn signed an authorization for a resurvey in 1735, and Dickinson had his boundaries run and a plot drawn of his "Mannor on Jones Creek." Then in 1739 before his removal to Kent he instituted the curious and wonderful legal process known as "common recovery" — an ancient device of the common law by which through a palpable fiction, a straw man, and prior agreement among interested parties, the owner could secure a sound title by virtue of a record of a proper court. This "recovery"

cleared Dickinson in possession of 1,368 acres as far as all claims under Maryland patents were concerned. There still were claimants to the same lands under Penn patents, however — and these men were not satisfied by the court record. They brought suit, and a second common recovery had to be recorded by Delaware courts in 1743. "This second Recovery," John Dickinson noted many years later as he studied his titles of his estates, "Seems to have been suffered with more Normality than that in 1739 — by making a Tenand to the Praecipe — " The papers, with his notes, still exist.

One more legal problem affected Samuel's plans. Under his grandfather's will, the Delaware farms had been devised to Walter, and for want of issue of his body to William (Samuel's father) and his heirs forever in fee tail. Now Samuel had bought out Walter's interest, but under devise of his grandfather, his own son Henry, being eldest male issue of his own body, would inherit the best part of what he was trying to build up here in Delaware for John and Philemon, regardless of any will he himself might draw. For he himself had, after all, only a fee tail in his grandfather's land.

To convert this to fee simple, Samuel drew up a petition "To His Excellency George Thomas Esqr Governour of Pennsylvania & of the Countys of New Castle Kent & Sussex in Delaware and the Honorable the Representatives of the Freemen of the said Countys in Generall Assembly met" praying that "the Entail of the Lands [to Henry] may be Docked and Destroyed and that an Absolute Estate of Inheritance in fee Simple . . . may be vested in the said Samuel Dickinson his heirs & Assigns for ever." The entail was docked successfully, when Samuel proved that he had settled other lands "superior in value" upon Henry. The Delaware legislature turned from its constant preoccupation with the shooting of crows and collecting of customs, to pass a bill Samuel drew up in his own hand, which freed him to do anything he wished with his Jones Neck lands, and he later provided in his will that if Henry ever attemtped to recover the Delaware farms, his whole inheritance in Maryland would be void.

These suits, counter-suits, common recoveries and docking of entails were part of the history of Delaware, for through such legal processes the myriad conflicts of grants and titles were resolved. Through them also, small farms were swallowed up in large, a single consolidated plantation fashioned out of separate homesteads, the capitalist's duty in the

stream of history performed. Through them, another current of history ran, the ever-increasing importance of the law and the lawyer. Samuel Dickinson's America by 1750 was a complex, as well as an old land. The proprietor's faith in the law, his dependence on it, his need for it, created ultimately a professional legal class. Out of the interwoven relationships of Baltimores and Penns with their colonists, of colonial landowners with their tenants, or producers with brokers and brokers with markets, of all elements in the capital structure with their own futures, emerged the first generation of the American bar. John Dickinson was a member of it. He had been raised in a family whose very property depended upon the mastery of processes of litigation so intricate that only the trained mind could follow them.

Samuel's other holdings gave him less trouble. From Daniel Rodeney, Sheriff of Kent, he bought "Brother's Portion," three hundred eighty-five acres adjoining Dover town. He took up warrants for vacant marsh lands at one shilling sterling the acre. From James Gordon, carpenter, and George Gordon, weaver, he secured "Rixam;" from several others the rest of "Burton's Delight;" from his cousin Walter the rest of "Wharton" and all of "Berry's Delight;" from Daniel Storm a plantation called "The Cave," from the Hunn and Manlove families a large area known as "Kingston-Upon-Hull." All these totalled a thousand acres, exclusive of the marsh warrants and the large "Kingston-Upon-Hull," the sizes of which are not known, and was in addition to the 1,368 acres involved in the common recoveries. After this, he owned all the lands north and east of St. Jones River between Dover and the Bay; he also owned town lots in Dover.

He had reproduced in Kent the same procedures he and his father had followed on the Chesapeake. Where formerly there had been a dozen small, independent farms each supporting the family of a tiller, carpenter, weaver, or miller, there was now one six-square-mile plantation of many patches, with a central mansion house where lived in generous state and comfort the busy proprietor of all this fertile wealth.

Land and water, forest, field and swamp, Kent County contained nearly six hundred square miles. More than a third was unsuited to farming, another third was inaccessible to the bay. Of the remainder, by 1735, fifty-four square miles had been taken up. Of this, Samuel Dickinson owned more than ten percent.

John Dickinson was eight years old when his family moved to the Jones Neck plantation. Here he grew up, amid scenes that almost live again as one wanders through Kent today. A primitive road that would accommodate chaise or wagon in its sandy ruts led from Dover down south-east through the fields and woods of "Brother's Portion" over a slight rise through thick groves and flat fields five miles and a bit to the Mansion House; then it passed eastward to Gordon's, Manlove's, Barker's, Fisher's, the side road to "Town Point," and finally the bayshore settlement of Kitts Hummock. People could travel to Dickinson's overland along this road, whether they came from Dover or the bay, or they could come by the river on the pinks and shallops that plied its winding course.

St. Jones River was forty or fifty feet wide at the flood, but the ten-to-twenty-foot depression it had cut and through which it twisted and turned, flowing up and down with the tide, was much wider, fully a mile across near the Mansion. All this river bottom was reed marsh and damp swamp, grown up with the sturdy grass that some years made good fodder hay, but was more often used for bedding and for covering the dirt floors of humble dwellings. The swamps were colorful with many plants, the setting sun touched in them a hundred hues through shimmering haze. But under the vegetation was a treacherous quicksand, and the damp vapors spread a mordant disease. In August and September, mosquitoes buzzed everywhere and the pungent stench of decay rose from the river. The fetid miasma of August was filled with sodden, misty dangers to humankind, the autumnal fever was an annual hazard in Kent. So enervating a climate made weak bodies. John Dickinson inherited this with all the other legacies of his environment, and as he grew into the tall, slender figure familiar to the streets, drawing rooms, courts and public councils of Philadelphia he carried with him a weakness of the chest which afflicted him all his life.

From the fields and woodlands, small springs and rills trickled into the river. Along their banks little wooden buildings were built — milk houses, a smoke house, cold cellars, slave cottages. Samuel's Negro valet Pompey with his wife and daughter Violet lived in one of these cabins. They no longer stand; since there was no native stone they were made of the plentiful timber, and they disappeared as time made them useless. On the higher ground fifty or a hundred yards back from the edge of the swamps were the homes of the tenants. In Samuel Dickinson's time most of these were of log; near the end of the century John was to build

at least one of brick which still stands today between the Mansion and the bay.

Largest and most imposing residence was the Mansion itself, one of the loveliest buildings of colonial Delaware. Samuel Dickinson was an elegant man, and he built an elegant house, fit for the high style he had been used to all his life. He fronted his mansion due south on a compass bearing, and in the sandy soil of Jones Neck he dug no deep basement or foundation, but set his thick brick walls on the clay sub-soil, so that his cellar floor was only a little below ground level.

The south wall, toward the river, he faced with glazed brick, laid in the Flemish bond. He probably imported the brick from England. A center door opened into a spacious, high-ceilinged hallway, lighted by a large window and a transom glass over the door. To the rear a wide, graceful staircase with shallow treads led to the upper floors. The wainscoating which must have lined the hall originally has gone, but the generous proportions of the hall itself bear witness to the elegance of Samuel Dickinson's plan.

To the right was the parlor, occupying the whole east side of the Mansion. A huge fireplace filled the north end, while two high windows each in the south and east walls reached almost from ceiling to floor. The windows were of two sixteen-pane sections each; some of the eighteenth-century glass remains. Clearly, this room was once finished in fine wood, and doubtless had a plaster-work ceiling. It was a tall, long, wide, open, light and airy room, as cool as Delaware summers permitted, heated in winter by the great fire.

To the left of the central hall were two small parlors, tiny rooms with corner fireplaces in each. The front room was called the "book room" when John Dickinson was a boy here; the back parlor became little more than a gallery or passageway when the first addition to the house was built.

On the second floor, over the parlor, was the large, handsome main bed chamber; over the book room and the small back parlor were two small chambers — perhaps Samuel meant to provide a room for each boy, John and Philemon — and in the front over the main door was a middle room with no fire, probably a sewing, dressing, and school room, sometimes a place to bed guests.

When Samuel Dickinson built it, the house had a full third story and a garret above that. This was made possible by a hipped roof which

rose directly from the wall-plates on the north and south sides. But a disastrous fire in John Dickinson's old age destroyed much of the interior, and when he rebuilt the house, John put on a much simpler roof, which is what stands today, altering the original lines of the structure and leaving the third story nothing but a vaulted open attic.

The cellar, almost at ground level and lighted by half-windows, contained a large storage room under the big parlor, wine cellar under the front door, and scullery and kitchen under the book room and back parlor.

Now apparently Samuel Dickinson built his house in the late 1730's, and evidently soon after his move he added a wing to the west of the Mansion. The addition contained one large room thirty feet long — the dining room — with fires at each end, three large windows on the north, two windows and a door on the south side. A storage and workroom was underneath; there were no fires here, probably meat was hung on the walls. A large bed chamber reached from the dining room by a cupboard staircase was above. The second addition, added about 1754, was the work wing, where servants performed their tasks, boiled soap and tallow, made sausage, did all the numerous jobs of an eighteenth-century household. The one room in this wing had ground-level doors for deliveries, and a large fire. Over it, reached by a tiny stairway and a crawl-hole, was a slaves' sleeping chamber.

It was a good Maryland-style house Samuel Dickinson built, with many interesting and some unique features. The low fens and meadows spread out before it, and small river craft moved sluggishly in the distance. It was a spacious, efficient establishment, the center of an enterprise in which each member of the family from master to groom of the stables lived in the manner to which his position in the arrangement of nature entitled him.

Many years after John Dickinson's death, his daughter Sally was curious about the early life of her father on Jones Neck. She quizzed the only person still living who had known the plantation from the beginning, ancient Violet Brown, daughter of the slave Pompey, Samuel Dickinson's valet. Violet told her of an easy, happy scene, and revealed some of those intimate aspects of family life which only word-of-mouth conveys. Sally wrote down what the old woman said. From this narrative of Violet, an extraordinary record, from John Dickinson's letters, and from

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the surviving building itself we learn something of the private history of the Dickinsons in their Kent County Mansion.

The common sitting room used most by the family was the dining room in the first addition. There Samuel had his curtained bed; "the room was large," Violet said, "and most nicely kept." As he grew old, the Squire must have found the double fires welcome; he could look from his bed up the lane to the road half-a-mile off, or the other way over the river valley lying in the afternoon sun.

His home was a cherished part of his busy life. He planned how he could develop it, how planting would enhance its beauties, he talked of putting in hedging, such as he had seen in England — two "Vistols cut due East and West, Parallel with the Front of the House, the first till it comes to the next open fields, & the other to the Creek . . .;" he talked of a piazza, and of a flower garden round the door, with another fronting the dining room and opening into the back garden. He planted ornamental fruit-orchards of apple, peach, and cherry trees. There was plenty of room for all his family. Henry's three daughters from Maryland as they grew up came now and then to pass weeks at a time with their grandfather, and doubtless Henry himself occasionally appeared for a visit. Cousin Walter and his wife were companionable neighbors, as were the Rodneys, the Vinings, the Chews, the Ridgelys, and others; perhaps Betsy Goldsborough before her death in 1749 brought her husband and little son to see the father who had consented to her marriage even though she could not walk among Quakers.

There were a thousand things for a boy to do in a home like this, with all the activities of the farm year going on about him — things in the woods and streams and orchards, in the stables, barns, and great house, things that leave no record except in the perishable memory of youth. John Dickinson's history from his eighth to his eighteenth year is as blank as his infancy at "Crosiadore." He was seven years older than Philemon; he must have grown up much alone, much in the sober company of his father and mother. He formed a most devoted affection for them. The slave Violet said long afterwards that no fonder children could be, than John and Philemon were to their parents, and John filled his letters whenever he was away with tender, affectionate expressions. "When I reflect on the Virtues of my Honourd Parents, I love & admire them, but when I think of their Goodness to Me, the Emotion excited in my Breast has no Name," he wrote from London at twenty-two. He

treasured all the scenes of his boyhood in Kent: "peaceful Plains, the dear House, and all the sweet domestick Pleasures I have enjoy'd; Chearful Days, quiet Nights, delightful Converse . . ."

Samuel Dickinson was a busy planter, and in his sixties he was sorely afflicted with gout, but he had time to be a devoted father. "I am indebted to You," John wrote him, "not only for my life, but for all the blessings of it. For Me, Your Cares & Labours have been employed; and to You I owe that Knowledge (whatever it be) that must guide Me thro the World. The kind affectionate Manner, in which it has been conveyed, shall stamp it upon my mind, & direct all my Actions to answer your Expectations, to fulfill your Desires." Pompey's daughter described Samuel Dickinson as a good, kind man. When Pompey died, Mrs. Dickinson attended his funeral, but the Squire was too ill to leave his chamber. As the procession filed by the Mansion House on its way to the burying ground of the plantation slaves, the "Old Master" had one of the windows of the dining room thrown open, that he might see the remains of his faithful servant pass.

And Violet remembered that earlier scene, in 1757, when young John returned from three years' study in England. There was great excitement at the Mansion. "Mistress sent word that the Coloured People must be drest clean, and come to see their young master — and *we* the children *came,* like a flock of blackbirds — ." The old master sent his chaise into Dover to meet John, and as it drove up to the house, the slaves lined both sides of the lane to cheer the traveller's homecoming, the young ones clutching cookies the mistress had given them to celebrate the occasion. Old Pompey kissed young John's hand, the flock of blackbirds bobbed and curtsied. The young master "noticed them kindly . . . " In speaking to them, Violet remembered, he would say "the Little bodies."

In this house, as Samuel Dickinson aged, young John grew to manhood. Here William Killen, fresh from Ireland, came to be his tutor; here he read his father's books, learned his first law, had his first training in business, in politics, and in Quakerism, too, for Mary Dickinson could not omit the Meeting from her life. The first three years after they came to Jones Neck, Samuel prevailed in his resentment against the Choptank stiffbacks. But then Mary secured, what Samuel never would, a letter from the Maryland Friends. The Third Haven Monthly Meeting in October, 1743, appointed two members to make enquiries and prepare a

certificate for her, "in order she may be join'd in Religious fellowship with friends . . . in Kent County on delaware." Samuel's name was not associated with hers in the recommendation.

Mary Dickinson used the plain speech all her life, Samuel Dickinson only occasionally did so. John Dickinson, even in family letters, used "you" and "yours" rather than "thee," "thou" and "thy," until his return to the Meeting in his middle fifties. Yet his mother's teachings, and the mysticism of the Friends, made an indelible impression upon him. He wrote to her in unmistakable terms of love and respect. "Had I the longest Life of Man to some, it would be insufficient With the utmost Industry & Attention to discharge that Debt I owe to your Care & Tenderness," he told his mother in 1754. In his absence he concerned himself with her health and welfare; he averred it was as impossible for him to think of her without being filled with goodness, as it was to behold the sun without being dazzled by its rays.

True goodness, indeed, was possible in the gracious, secure, benevolent and quiet life of the plantation home on Jones Neck. Beneath all the busy occupations of master, mistress, and children lay the solid earth and its product, communicating to those who lived on it a spirit of repose and contemplation. At the end of his career, John Dickinson was to return to the land and its spirit, just as he once predicted he would: "When I have acquired Honor enough to shed some few Rays of Lustre on Retreat, I am sure I shall turn Husbandman . . ."

It was inevitable that Squire Samuel Dickinson should involve himself in Delaware politics. Public affairs were a duty of the planter's station. Two years before he moved over from Maryland, actually in 1738, he was, surprisingly, appointed Justice of the Court of Common Pleas of Kent County, a position he apparently held till his death. In the late 1740's he was meeting with the Provincial Council, presumably in his judicial capacity; he was Justice of the Peace from 1744 on; his name appeared every term as one of those subscribing the oaths of abjuration and allegiance required of officers in His Majesty's service. Secretary Peters spoke of him as "Mr. Justice Dickinson;" he was graciously received by the Proprietor himself, Thomas Penn.

But his life was still the land, and in the business of the earth and its fullness he trained his son. John was not yet sixteen when he was taking a hand in the Jones Neck wheat farms, and riding into Maryland on tobacco errands. His parents gave him a body-servant, Cato, a slave

child Dickinson's own age who grew up with him on the plantation. The young master and servant doubtless enjoyed their adventures over to "Crosiadore" to confer with Henry and Cousin Charles Dickinson in Dorset. Samuel supervised his Chesapeake lands as carefully as he could, but no amount of care could forestall the decay that inevitably followed absenteeism. Henry acted for him in Talbot County, Charles Dickinson in Dorchester; both received detailed directions from the Judge in Jones Neck. Still, things did not go well with the tobacco interest. In 1747, when he was fifteen, John was sent by his father to Talbot County with bills of exchange drawn on the London factor John Hanbury to pay his Michaelmas quit-rents. Apparently his Maryland tobacco had not borne even that fixed cost. He carried a letter to Thomas Bozman, collector, in which Samuel detailed all his lands and the rents due on them; he took back a receipt from Friend Bozman.

Young John made these trips regularly. Some of the rent collections from the Maryland farms involved difficult finance: at Christmas time there was frequently as much as five thousand pounds sterling-worth of London bills to be brought back to Kent. And distance of the owner from his farms created all sorts of problems. One time the Judge was so exasperated as to accuse his cousin Charles of cheating, to which the Dorset collector rejoined that though he was a man of humble station, he despised sharp dealing as much "as thou of Superior Estates or Degrees." On another occasion Charles had discouraging news of the Dorset tenants for the distant owner: "Tregoe pays well. Arnett is far behind & unless he Can Do Something this year (altho its a bad one on us all in General) I must Call on him. They are plagueing me for nails but will Give them none without orders . . . Smith's note I got from Henry some time agoe but you'll be Set to Get any thing for it [*i. e.*, tobacco] has Gone to the Doggs . . . All whole Gold (German excepted) Goes at 3.17. pound Sterling; German will not pass at any thing with us . . ." In these lands and these problems, John Dickinson received his apprenticeship. From land, after his father's death, he would receive much of his wealth.

In Delaware, the youth had an even more extensive experience in land management than in Maryland, and what he learned about the Jones Neck plantation was to be useful to him all his days. Wherever he was, whatever the state of his public career, he always had to spend much of his time with his lands — writing leases and renewals of leases, authorizing the building of fences, draining of swamps, or erection of

barns, planning the marketing of crops and the operations of the next year, confronting the manifold problems of little lives.

In the midst of a critical election in Philadelphia he must turn his attention to listing the cows, oxen, horses, mules, sheep and hogs on one of his properties. From addressing the Pennsylvania Assembly he must retire to his study and write a soothing letter to his litigious and envious Jones Neck neighbor Thomas Rodney. He could not attend the Federal Convention of 1787 until he had spent a month in Kent on his regular spring trip. From his retirement in Wilmington, he must make a journey to Philadelphia to dicker with the insurance company over repairing the Mansion after it has burnt.

He must deal with hundreds of incidents, vignettes of human experience, which contain both tragedy and comedy in the brief glimpses they give us into his Jones Neck affairs. Mary Hays, widow, two weeks after her husband's death has been put off the Kent farm she had supposed was Dickinson's, by a man who claims to be the new owner; she writes for advice and help: "now I have neither house nor home to put my head in now I have nothing to trust to but the Almighty God and your honour . . ." Deborah White, also a widow, petitions to clear the land for a turnip field; her Negroes will not obey her, the peach orchard is a den of thieves, her slaves full of mischief: "If the old Blacks say that I Picked the Woll I offered them it is notorious false for I weighed all the woll that Come off the Sheep Except three fleecis to make their Compliment which I never opened, to See Whether it was good or bad the artickles mentioned Clean well but I Expect no Cleaner than Come of the Sheeps Back."

During the War of the Revolution, when the British marched into Philadelphia to occupy the city, the famous John Dickinson was one of their principal targets. His fine seat "Fairhill" on the Germantown Road was burned, and he himself was hunted by Howe's troops. But the Mansion on Jones Neck furnished a refuge; he sent his family down here to Kent while he followed his public employments at Dover, Wilmington, and with the itinerant Congress. During the occupation of Philadelphia, Deborah Logan (cousin of John Dickinson's wife) wrote a letter from "Stenton" behind the British lines to "Mary Dickinson, near Dover." As she sealed it, Debby added this endorsement below the address:

> I hope if this letter falls into the hands of any in Authority they will excuse every thing in it, that is not Agreeable to their minds when they reflect that it comes from a giddy girl — who has no intentions of hurting any one, and she hopes they will be so polite As to Seal it up again & send it to the person to whom it is directed.

Mary received the letter in the house on Jones Neck.

Occupation of Philadelphia closed the traffic on the Delaware River, one immediate result of which was that the poor of the city during the hard winter while Washington was at Valley Forge could get no firewood. Dickinson sent two hundred cords from Kent as a donation; he sent grain and meat, too, that Philadelphians might not starve.

Long after the Dickinsons were safely back in the liberated city, the war reached Jones Neck. It was in August, 1781; the Board of Associated Loyalists in New York planned a raid which would strike both at John Dickinson and at the patriots in Delaware. About seven o'clock on a hot, sultry morning, a well-armed party of sixteen Tories, led by one Nash, landed from whaleboats on the shores of the Delaware Bay near the mouth of St. Jones River. They marched up past the tenant farms clear to the Mansion, where they demanded the keys from the terrified Negro servants. For two hours they systematically looted the house. Chests of silver, all the plate except a few teaspoons, Mrs. Dickinson's clothing, Dickinson's too, and a great quantity of linens, "all your Bottled wine—two barrels of Cherry bounce — your whole stock of Salted Meat, and your Negro Man Isaac, who went voluntarily with them," they carried to Kitts Hummock, where a boat had been hauled up. One of the marauders was heard to say to Dickinson's Negroes that "they would rather have their Master than all they had taken."

It was a shocking episode. Mrs. Dickinson was concerned to know what was lost: "there is a great deal of China queens ware & Pewter — that was I there I would try to secure, and that Large bed could not be purchased for £50, ye Glasses are valuable so is ye Kitchen furniture — & flat Irons — & innumerable things — "

John Dickinson came down at once to put his pillaged estate in order. While he was here, to his genuine surprise, he was chosen President of The Delaware State, and though he returned to Pennsylvania after only a single year, still the inflation and depression of the post-war period brought him more and more into Kent. He grubbed and cleared new

land, he acquired even more farms, he straightened the road down the Neck, he let contracts for breaking and swingling flax, he rearranged all his tenant leases, providing for payment in wheat, Indian corn, wool, Delaware money — whatever his tenants could find to pay in. And also in 1781 he freed all his slaves, Violet among them, by manumission — and then gave them permanent, paid employment at the Mansion House and on the plantation.

Maryland had been the place of John Dickinson's birth, Philadelphia the center of his public life, Wilmington the scene of his retirement. But the House on Jones Neck was his longest home, the background from which he came, the hub and center always of his fortune. John Dickinson's world was far different from his father's. Colonial America with its elegant stability and British-oriented culture was quickly supplanted in the turmoil of the son's Revolutionary age. These men, father and son, spanned in their two lives the years between 1689 and 1808, the years between Locke and Jefferson, between James II and Napoleon, between Dryden and Shelley. The whole of the eighteenth century passed before them as they developed their Jones Neck plantation. It was Samuel Dickinson, the father, a whole generation older than his brilliant son, who built the conditions of both their living. He built well and solidly, both a life and a profession, that endured even though the upheaval of his world.

Samuel was the genius of the Jones Neck estate. He saw his son grow to manhood, sent him to England, saw him return; he lived till John Dickinson was established as one of the brightest and busiest lawyers in Philadelphia.

Then one day, when none but his wife was about in the great house on Jones Neck, Samuel Dickinson's chronic illnesses suddenly seized him with something worse than gout. Fast riders were sent off to Maryland and Philadelphia, but neither Henry nor John nor Philemon arrived in time. Samuel Dickinson died quickly and unexpectedly. But even for this he had carefully prepared. His elaborate will described his whole life, and what he had planned for his sons. Samuel Dickinson had committed John forever to the land — to the pattern of proprietorship, the vigorous realities of the soil and the people who tilled it.

Perhaps it was this pattern and all that it meant, all that his father had done in his life on the land, that John Dickinson held in his mind when he began his most famous work with the words, *I am a Farmer . . .*

To reach the Mansion from the north, proceed south on Route 113 to the Kitts Hummock Road, five miles south of Dover. The Kitts Hummock Road is marked by a sign pointing to the east. Proceed on this road one mile to the next directional sign pointing south to the Mansion. Then drive on this lane to the parking area.

For those approaching from the south of Dover, proceed north on Route 113. One mile beyond the bridge over the St. Jones River, bear right on Route 9, go to the first stop sign, turn right (east) on the Kitts Hummock Road to the Dickinson Mansion directional sign. Then turn right (south) along the lane to the parking area near the Mansion.