

Memo. On Anna Dickinson. ←

She was only eighteen when the war began. A Quaker girl of Philadelphia with a pathetic personal struggle on her hands. Her mother had been left a widow with five children, and when Anna was fourteen she was so stirred by the burden, that she undertook her own support. She became a copyist, then a district school teacher - anything to which she could turn her hand. She was an eager impatient girl, resentful of the inequality she saw about her, quick to espouse the cause of the weaker, the slave, the woman and the fallen. She was indiscreet in expression, always flaming out in passionate accusation or vindication. She seems to have been a natural orator, and her first speech on woman's rights when she was a girl of only sixteen led to her being asked frequently to speak on that subject. About the time the war broke out, a place had been found for her in the mint at Washington, ^{but} she was no unbridled in her criticisms of McClellan, that she finally was removed. Soon after this she prepared a lecture which she called "The National Crisis." It went so well, that she was asked to deliver it in New Hampshire in the fall of 1862, when the Republicans were having a hard time in the elections. She canvassed the state with wonderful success. She was then asked to go to Connecticut where it was not thought that the party could win. It is probably not too much to say that it was Anna Dickinson's lectures which turned the tide. She was taken up after this by the Union League Clubs and sent hither and yon as the cause seemed to demand. In the fall of '62 she canvassed the mining districts of Pennsylvania where draft riots had broken out, and always with excellent effect. It is probable that Anna Dickinson's matter would not stand close criticism. Lawrence Godkin who heard her in Hartford in the fall of '62 says that a large portion of her discourse was devoted to topics which she evidently understood only in-

perfectly, if at all; that she was often incoherent; that the effective parts were a very faithful description of the assault on Fort Donalson and personal hits directed against the leading Democrats. These things told with her audience. Mr. Godkin consider^{ed} her, however, a very remarkable person, who above all needed to study and to reflect. It should be said that during the war he made no criticism of her work, and it was only afterward when she put out a very bad novel that he gave his opinion - a most unpopular opinion at the time, unfortunately. There is no question that if she had received and followed judicious criticism after the war, her future work might have been vastly more useful and permanent. However that may be, her usefulness to the Union cause in the war cannot be questioned. There is another side, too, that should not be lost sight of. Anna Dickinson effectually ended popular opposition in the North to women lecturers. The people began generally to feel that if a woman could render a patriotic service of this kind, the day had passed when there should be objection to her doing it.

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Much more significant than the soldiering a few women did is the service which certain ones rendered the Union cause as lecturers or pamphleteers. Take the case of Anna Dickinson. She was only eighteen when the war began—a Quaker girl of Philadelphia with a pathetic personal struggle on her hands. Her mother had been left a widow with five children, and when Anna was fourteen she was so stirred by the burden that she undertook her own support. She became a copyist, then a district school teacher—anything to which she could turn her hand. She was an eager, impatient girl, resentful of the inequalities she saw about her, quick to espouse the cause of the weaker, the slave, the woman and the fallen. She was indiscreet in expression, always flaming out in passionate accusation or vindication. She seems to have been a natural orator, and her first speech on woman's rights, when she was a girl of only sixteen, led her to being asked frequently to speak on that subject. Just before the war broke out, a place had been found for her in the mint at Washington, but she was so unbridled in her criticisms of McClellan that she finally was removed. Soon after this she prepared a lecture which she called "The National Crisis." It made so strong an impression that she was asked to deliver it in New Hampshire in the fall of 1862, when the Republicans were having a hard time in the elections. She canvassed the State with wonderful success. She was then asked to go to Connecticut, where it was not thought that the party could win. It is probably not too much to say that it was Anna Dickinson's lectures which turned the tide. She was taken up after this by the Union League Clubs and sent hither and yon as the cause seemed to demand, and always with excellent effect. ~~It is probable that Anna Dickinson's matter would not stand close criticism. F. L. Godkin, who heard her in Hartford in the fall of '62, says that a large portion of her discourse was devoted to topics which she evidently understood only imperfectly, if at all; that she was often incoherent; that the effective parts were a very youthful description of the assault on Fort Donaldson and personal hits directed against the leading Democrats. But Anna Dickinson had youth, beauty, fire, eloquence. She swept her audience before her as a great singer or actress does. Even Mr. Godkin considered her a very remarkable person. It should be said that during the war he made no criticism of her work, and it was only afterward, when she put out a very bad novel, that he gave his opinion that above all she needed to study and to reflect—a most unpopular opinion at the time, unfortunately. There is no question that if she had received and followed judicious criticism, her future work might have been more permanent. However that may be, her usefulness to the Union cause in the war cannot be questioned. There is another side, too, that should not be lost sight of. Anna Dickinson effectually ended popular opposition in the North to women lecturers. The people began to feel that if a woman could render a patriotic service of this kind, the day had passed when there should be objection to her doing it. She may be said to have ended the struggle begun twenty years before by the Grimké Sisters, Lucretia Mott, Lucy Stone and others for the right to the platform. It was the old story over again of the service convincing as in the long run it always does. Of the need winning a right when agitation alone would drag on forever.~~

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