

**MEMORIAL ADDRESSES ON THE
LIFE AND CHARACTER OF
THADDEUS STEVENS: DELIVERED
IN THE HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

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Memorial addresses on the life and character of Thaddeus Stevens: delivered in the House of representatives by Various

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THADDEUS STEVENS,

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

WASHINGTON, D. C., DECEMBER 17, 1868.

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ADDRESSES.

Remarks by Mr. Dickey.

MR. SPEAKER: The painful duty has devolved upon me of announcing to this House the death of my predecessor, Hon. THADDEUS STEVENS, of Pennsylvania.

This distinguished statesman was not merely my predecessor in this body, but in my childhood my father taught me to admire and love him, who was the instructor and guide of my youth and the friend of my mature years. If an intimacy with wise and noble men be one of the greatest blessings that can crown a man, then in no part of my career have I been so fortunate as in my association with Thaddens Stevens. It was in his office, and in connection with him, that I commenced my professional life; and from that moment, through the turmoil of many legal and political contests, down to the moment when in his last will he selected me to perform the last service one man can ask from his fellow, our friendship suffered neither diminution nor interruption.

Informed that my duty requires of me a sketch of the history of my friend, I hope to be pardoned by the House for any prolixity of statement, promising to leave to others abler and fitter, his associates here who are to follow me, the analysis of his character as a statesman and the story of his struggles and triumphs in this arena, where he was recognized as a great leader and bore the name of "The Old Commoner."

Thaddeus Stevens was born at Danville, Caledonia county, Vermont, on the 4th day of April, 1792, and died at his residence in this city at midnight on the 11th day of August, 1868. His parents were poor, in a community where poverty was the rule and wealth the exception. Of his father

I know but little, save that he enlisted in the war of 1812, and died in service. Upon his mother chiefly fell the burden of rearing their four sons. She was a woman of great energy, strong will, and deep piety. Early seeing the ambition and fully sympathizing with the aspirations of her crippled boy, she devotedly seconded his efforts for the acquisition of knowledge, and by her industry, energy, and frugality largely aided him in procuring a collegiate education. He returned her affection with the full strength of his strong nature, and for many years after he had acquired fame and fortune in his adopted State had the pleasure of making an annual pilgrimage to the home which he had provided for her comfort, and where she dispensed, with means he furnished, a liberal charity.

In the last year of his life, in writing his will with his own hand, while making no provision for the care of his own grave, he did not forget that of his mother, but set apart an ample sum for that purpose, directing yearly payments upon the condition "that the sexton keep the grave in good order, and plant roses and other cheerful flowers at each of the four corners of said grave every spring." In the same instrument, in devising \$1,000 in aid of the establishment at his home of a Baptist church, of which society his mother was an earnest member, he says:

I do this out of respect to the memory of my mother, to whom I owe whatever little prosperity I have had on earth, which, small as it is, I desire emphatically to acknowledge.

After attending the common schools of the neighborhood he fitted for college at the Peacham Academy, in his native county, entered the University of Vermont, and remained there about two years. The college suspending operations on account of the war, he proceeded to Dartmouth, and graduated at that institution in 1814. After reading law at Peacham, in the office of Judge Mattocks, for some months,

he left his native State and settled in Pennsylvania in 1815, first in the town of York, where he taught an academy and pursued his legal studies. The rules of court in that district having required students to read one year in the office of an attorney, he went to Belair, Harford county, Maryland, and was there examined and admitted to practice in August, 1816. He at once returned to Pennsylvania and opened a law office at Gettysburg, in the county of Adams, and entered upon the practice of his profession in that and adjoining counties. He was soon in the possession of an extensive and lucrative business, to which he gave his entire attention for some sixteen years. I may here be allowed briefly to allude to a few traits of Mr. Stevens as a lawyer. Although not perhaps of great national reputation as such, he was recognized by the profession in a State claiming some eminence for the high character of her advocates and jurists as one of her greatest lawyers, and was so pronounced by three of her ablest chief justices, Gibson, Black, and Lewis, who tried him by the sure test of uniform power.

I need scarcely say that Mr. Stevens shone at the bar with the same clearness of statement, force, and eloquence of expression, power of argumentation, wit, sarcasm, and invective, which he employed in legislative halls, and that there, as here, he was master of all the weapons of debate. As an advocate he was always jealous of the rights of his profession, and resisted their innovation. He was always courteous to the court, and uniformly brief, never speaking beyond an hour upon any question. He never took or used notes of the evidence, the speeches of opponents, or the rulings of the court, trusting wholly to a memory that never failed him. In the preparation of his law he was industrious and careful; here, too, relying upon his memory, his brief seldom contained more than the name of the case and page of the book.

In argument he cited but few authorities, and those directly to his purpose. Grasping one or two points which he conceived vital to the cause, he directed all his energies and concentrated all his powers upon them, giving little attention to subordinate questions. No matter with whom associated, he never tried a cause save upon his own theory of the case. At *nisi prius* he uniformly insisted on personally seeing and examining, before they were called, the important witnesses on his own side. Generally relying upon the strength and presentation of his own case, he seldom indulged in extended cross-examination of witnesses, though possessing rare ability in that direction. He never consented to be concerned or to act as counsel in the prosecution of a capital case, not from opposition to the punishment, but because it was repugnant to his feelings and that service was the duty of public officers. He was as remarkable for his consideration, forbearance, and kindness when opposed by the young, weak, or diffident, as he was for the grim jest, haughty sneer, pointed sarcasm, or fierce invective launched at one who entered the lists and challenged battle with such weapons. He was always willing to give advice and assistance to the young and inexperienced members of the profession, and his large library was ever open for their use. He had many young men read law with him, though he did not care to have students. There were, however, two recommendations which never failed to procure an entrance into his office: ambition to learn, and inability to pay for the privilege.

Mr. Stevens first engaged actively in politics with the rise of the anti-Masonic party in 1828-'29, which he joined in their opposition to secret societies. He was elected to the popular branch of the legislature of his State, in 1833, as a representative from the county of Adams, and continued to serve in that body almost without interruption until 1840, during

which entire period he was the leader of his party in the legislature, if not the State. During this service he championed many measures of improvement, among others the common-school system of Pennsylvania, which at a critical moment he saved from overthrow by a speech which he always asserted to have been, in his opinion, the most effective he ever made. By that single effort he established the principle, never since seriously questioned in Pennsylvania, that it is the duty of the State to provide the facilities for education to all the children of the Commonwealth. In behalf of this measure he joined hands with his bitterest personal and political enemies. He highly eulogized for his course upon this question the chief of the opposing political party, Governor George Wolf, and denounced with all his power of invective the time-servers of his own party. Himself the child of poverty he plead the cause of the poor, and by the force of his will, intellect, and eloquence, broke down the barriers enacted by wealth, caste, and ignorance, and earned a name that will endure as long as a child of Pennsylvania gratefully remembers the blessings conferred by light and knowledge.

In 1837-'38, Mr. Stevens was a member of the convention called to revise the constitution of Pennsylvania, an assemblage which numbered as members many of the strongest men of the State, among whom Mr. Stevens stood in the front rank. This convention, notwithstanding the able and strenuous opposition of a strong minority, led by Mr. Stevens, inserted the word "white" as a qualification of suffrage, thus disfranchising a race. On this account he refused to append his name to the completed instrument, and stood alone in such refusal. For the same cause he opposed, but unsuccessfully, the ratification by the people.

In 1842 Mr. Stevens, finding himself deeply in debt by reason of losses in the iron business, and liabilities incurred for

numerous endorsements made for friends, removed to Lancaster county, one of the largest, richest, and most populous counties of the State, and resumed the practice of his profession. His reputation as a lawyer had preceded him, and his income almost at once became the largest at the bar. In a few years he paid his debts, and saved the bulk of his estate. In 1848 and 1850 he was elected to Congress from Lancaster county, when, declining to be a candidate, he returned to his profession until 1858, when he was again elected, and continued to hold the seat without interruption till his death. His course upon this floor has passed into and forms no unimportant part in the history of a mighty people in a great crisis of their existence. But I have promised to leave to others to say what may be proper in illustration of his great achievements in his latter days.

To those here who judged of the personal appearance of the deceased only as they looked on him bearing the burden of years and stricken with disease, though he still stood with eye undimmed and will undaunted, I may say that in his prime he was a man physically well proportioned, muscular and strong, of clear and ruddy complexion, with face and feature of great mobility and under perfect command and control. In his youth and early manhood, notwithstanding his lameness, he entered with zest into almost all of the athletic games and sports of the times. He was an expert swimmer and an excellent horseman. When residing at Gettysburg he followed the chase, and kept his hunters and hounds.

On a recent visit to his iron-works I found the old mountain men garrulous with stories of the risks and dangers of the bold rider, as with horse and hound he followed the deer along the slopes and through the gaps of the South mountain.

In private life, among his friends, Mr. Stevens was ever genial, kind, and considerate. To them he was linked with