



Frederick Douglass (Classics - Frederick Douglass)

Charles Chesnutt

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Frederick Douglass Charles Chesnut Frederick Douglass was an African-American social reformer, abolitionist, orator, writer, and statesman. After escaping from slavery in Maryland, he became a national leader of the abolitionist movement in Massachusetts and New York, gaining note for his dazzling oratory and incisive antislavery writings. In his time he was described by abolitionists as a living counter-example to slaveholders' arguments that slaves lacked the intellectual capacity to function as independent American citizens. Northerners at the time found it hard to believe that such a great orator had once been a slave. Douglass's fame as an orator has long been secure. His position as the champion of an oppressed race, and at the same time an example of its possibilities, was, in his own generation, as picturesque as it was unique; and his life may serve for all time as an incentive to aspiring souls who would fight the battles and win the love of mankind. The average American of to-day who sees, when his attention is called to it, and deplores, if he be a thoughtful and just man, the deep undertow of race prejudice that retards the progress of the colored people of our own generation, cannot, except by reading the painful records of the past, conceive of the mental and spiritual darkness to which slavery, as the inexorable condition of its existence, condemned its victims and, in a less measure, their oppressors, or of the blank wall of proscription and scorn by which free people of color were shut up in a moral and social Ghetto, the gates of which have yet not been entirely torn down. From this night of slavery Douglass emerged, passed through the limbo of prejudice which he encountered as a freeman, and took his place in history. "As few of the world's great men have ever had so checkered and diversified a career," says Henry Wilson, "so it may at least be plausibly claimed that no man represents in himself more conflicting ideas and interests. His life is, in itself, an epic which finds few to equal it in the realms of either romance or reality." It was, after all, no misfortune for humanity that Frederick Douglass felt the iron hand of slavery; for his genius changed the drawbacks of color and condition into levers by which he raised himself and his people.

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