

GREATNESS OF DOUGLASS

"The Most Picturesque Historical Figure in Modern Times."

EULOGIZED BY THE REV. DR. BANKS

His Lofty Ideals Alone Made It Possible for Him to Achieve the Great Triumphs of

His Life.

The Hanson Place Methodist Episcopal Church, Brooklyn, was well filled last evening when the pastor, the Rev. Dr. Louis A. Banks, delivered an excellent sermon on "Frederick Douglass, the Eloquent, the Most Picturesque Historical Figure in Modern Times."

Dr. Banks took for his text these words:

"Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen?"

"If I were asked," he said, "what person in the present century had fought against the greatest odds and won in the struggle of life at most points, I should answer, Frederick Douglass. There is a great deal of talk about self-made men in our time, and we have had an abundance of eloquence concerning Abraham Lincoln's rise from the place of railsplitter to the Presidency; concerning Gen. Grant's career from the tannery to the position of first American citizen, and concerning Garfield's, from the tow path to the White House; but none of these men, nor all of them put together, had to make life's race with such a handicap or facing such odds as had Frederick Douglass.

"Here is a man who learned to read and write by studying out the characters made by the carpenters in the Baltimore lumber yards, who comes by his own devoted effort to speak the English language with an eloquence equal to Charles Sumner, or Henry Ward Beecher, in their best days.

"Here is a man who did not know who his father was, who never saw his mother but a few times, and then by moonlight or by glimpses caught by a tallow dip, in a log cabin; who came to be a bosom friend of John Bright, the intimate of Abraham Lincoln, the boon companion of Daniel O'Connell; who came to be loved by Wendell Phillips and William Lloyd Garrison, and was held in highest honor and most tender regard by many of the noblest women of both continents; came to be the undisputed leader of his race; known wherever the English language is spoken, and to be respected by the whole civilized world.

"The story of his life is the most romantic of all modern times. No man began so low and climbed so high as he.

"Frederick Douglass had many elements of greatness, and one of the greatest was his power of grim perseverance. He had the power to patiently, ploddingly, whip himself through any hard work that must be done. It was once said by an opponent of Sir Walter Raleigh: 'He can toil terribly.' Frederick Douglass had in a remarkable degree that terrible, irresistible power of the toiler. Whether it was learning to read by the carpenters' marks on strips of building timber, or plodding, after he was a grown man, through the grammar of the English language, or setting himself, in middle age, to acquire that information and knowledge necessary to make him a skillful friend of his people, he had the perseverance and the pluck and the devotion to toil mercilessly until his task was accomplished.

"Frederick Douglass had great ideals. He never compromised with himself for anything less than the best that was possible. Nothing short of being the very best type of man and the most noble orator that it was possible to produce out of his circumstances and gifts satisfied him for a moment.

These lofty ideals alone made it possible for him to achieve the great triumphs of his life. For, after all, the greatest triumph of Douglass's life is not to be found in his glorious success as an orator, nor in his triumphs as a political leader, but in the splendid moral fibre of the man, that enabled him to live a life which is not only a precious heritage to his own race, but an inspiration to men of all races, throughout all time. Think of the fearful odds he had to fight against in order to produce such a moral character.

"Milton says: 'It is a long way out of hell up to light.' Think of the hell of iniquity into which he was born. He was born in the midst of that enforced tendency to every vicious passion and unholy appetite that springs from the world, the flesh, and the devil; but in spite of it all, he developed a strong, robust manhood, which he kept clean and spotless throughout half a century lived in the public gaze. Frederick Douglass did no greater thing for his race than that.

"Douglass's oratory gained much of its power from the superb manhood that was behind him. I once heard him deliver his great address on John Brown. His discussion of the law of retribution was the strongest I ever heard. As he stood there on the platform, giving us the evolution of John Brown, he filled one's ideal of the old Hebrew prophets. He reached the climax in these words:

"The cry that went up from the startled and terrified inhabitants of Harper's Ferry was but the echo of that other cry which began two hundred years before, when the man hunter first set foot in the quiet African villages. The raid on Harper's Ferry was contracted for when the first slave ship landed on these shores."

"The question has been often asked," said Douglass, in that great address, "why Virginia, with a grand magnanimity, did not spare John Brown? But they had a stand down there, and that thing could not stand the life of John Brown. Her own Patrick Henry loved liberty for the rich man and the great; John Brown loved liberty for the poor and lowly. It was not white man dying for white man; it was white man dying for black man. He came down from the heaven of New-England liberty to the hell of African slavery. He gave his life as the best gift he could lay on the altar of human liberty."

"Frederick Douglass was a broad-spirited, public man. He was too large a man for any bitter, bigoted partisanship. His declaration about some public affair, not long ago, in a letter which has been printed, in which he says: 'I am a Republican, but I am not a Republican right or wrong,' shows the breadth of the man. And it is well to notice in connection with this fact the marvelous growth in Frederick Douglass's time in toleration of freedom of principles and speech which is illustrated in the House of Representatives of the North Carolina Legislature, adjourning in honor of Frederick Douglass, on receiving the news of his death last Thursday.

"It is very appropriate that his last appearance in public should have been on the very day of his death. To no other cause had he given more sincere devotion than to the equality of rights and privileges between man and woman.

"I heard him, one time, in an address on woman's suffrage, in reply to the suggestion that the pool of politics was too dirty to allow women to come into it, ask, with stinging sarcasm, 'Who made the pool dirty? No woman has been playing in it.'

"The fact that a bill now before the New-York Legislature to punish by flogging certain classes of human brutes has been so amended by that august body as to permit a man to beat his wife without danger of punishment, very clearly indicates that there is great necessity that Frederick Douglass's mantle shall fall upon younger men, and that his position, that a disfranchised class will always be an oppressed class, was well taken.

"No man doubts for a moment that if equal suffrage had been granted by the last Constitutional Convention the wife-beater would have had to take his flogging along with the other brutes.

"A career like that of Frederick Douglass is at once an honor and an inspiration to humanity. In such a man the kinship of all races is demonstrated."