

**LIFE OF STEPHEN A.
DOUGLAS,
PP. 1-236**

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Life of Stephen A. Douglas, pp. 1-236 by William Gardner

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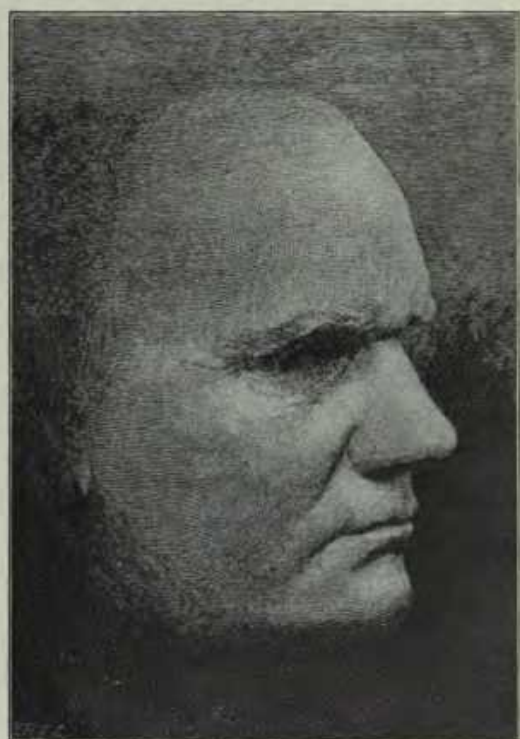
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WILLIAM GARDNER

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Life
of
Stephen A. Douglas

BY
WILLIAM GARDNER

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PREFACE.

De mortuis nil nisi bonum, (of the dead speak nothing but good), is the rule which governed the friends of Stephen A. Douglas after his death. "Of political foes speak nothing but ill," is the rule which has guided much of our discussion of him for forty years. The time has now arrived when we can study him dispassionately and judge him justly, when we can take his measure, if not with scientific accuracy, at least with fairness and honesty.

Where party spirit is as despotic as it is among us, it is difficult for any man who spends his life amid the storms of politics to get justice until the passions of his generation have been forgotten. Even then he is generally misjudged—canonized as a saint, with extravagant eulogy, by those who inherit his party name, and branded as a traitor or a demagogue by those who wear the livery of opposition.

Douglas has perhaps suffered more from this method of dealing with our political heroes than any other American statesman of the first class. He died at the opening of the Civil War. It proved

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to be a revolution which wrought deep changes in the character of the people. It was the beginning of a new era in our national life. We are in constant danger of missing the real worth of men in those *ante-bellum* years because their modes of thought and feeling were not those of this generation.

The Civil War, with its storm of passion, banished from our minds the great men and gigantic struggles of the preceding decade. We turned with scornful impatience from the pitiful and abortive compromises of those times, the puerile attempts to cure by futile plasters the cancer that was eating the vitals of the nation. We hastily concluded that men who belonged to the party of Jefferson Davis and Judah P. Benjamin during those critical years were of doubtful loyalty and questionable patriotism, that men who battled with Lincoln, Seward and Chase could hardly be true-hearted lovers of their country. Douglas died too soon to make clear to a passion-stirred world that he was as warmly attached to the Union, as intensely loyal, as devotedly patriotic, as Lincoln himself.

The grave questions arising from the War, which disturbed our politics for twenty years, the great economic questions which have agitated us for the past fifteen years, bear slight relation to those dark problems with which Douglas and his contemporaries grappled. He was on the wrong side of many struggles preliminary to the War. He was not a profound student of political economy, hence is not an authority for any party in the perplexing questions of recent times. The result is that the greatest political leader of the most momentous

decade of our history is less known to us than any second-rate hero of the Revolution.

It is not of much importance now to any one whether Douglas is loved or hated, admired or despised. It is of some importance that he be understood.

I have derived this narrative mainly from original sources. The biography written during his lifetime by his friend Sheahan, and that published two years after his death by his admirer, Flint, are chiefly drawn on for the brief account of his early life. The history of his career in Congress has been gathered from the Congressional Record; the account of Conventions from contemporary reports, and the Debates with Lincoln from the authorized publication.

I have not consciously taken any liberty with any text quoted, except to omit superfluous words, which omissions are indicated by asterisks. I have not attempted to pronounce judgment on Douglas or his contemporaries, but to submit the evidence. Not those who write, but those who read, pass final judgment on the heroes of biography.