

**A VOTER'S VERSION OF
THE LIFE AND CHARACTER
OF STEPHEN ARNOLD
DOUGLAS; PP.1-127**

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ROBERT B. WARDEN

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LIFE AND CHARACTER

OF

STEPHEN ARNOLD DOUGLAS.

By ROBERT B. WARDEN.

"Wilde Stürme, Kriegswogen
Das'ten ueber Hain und Dach;
Ewig doch und allgemach
Stell'st dich hier der bunte Regen."
GÖTTE.

COLUMBUS:

FOLLETT, FOSTER AND COMPANY.

1860.

INTRODUCTION.

By a Voter's Version of the Life and Character of Douglas is intended here a history of that great statesman, drawn from all known sources of the truth, transforming into simple statement of the truth as apprehended much that is extravagant in other histories of Douglas, and dependent wholly on the vigor and beauty of the truth for its attractiveness.

The writer has been urged to undertake this version, not by a committee, but by voters as such. When the work was first suggested to him, he had seeming reasons for regarding it with strong repugnance. And he was not easily induced to undertake it.

To appear before the public, with whatever careful explanation, as the author of a Life and Character of Douglas, is to risk the imputation of an undue eagerness to figure as a politician. Reasons which the author need not here advance, make him especially desirous to avoid that imputation.

But each voter, as such, has a duty to perform at present, of which few have had examples. The approaching contest at the polls may be well described as an expected but a quite unprecedented trial of ideas, interests, and relations. Puerile

attempts to ridicule this notion will not hide from thinking voters its entire agreement with the truth. In view of it, a voter who is thought to have it in his power to produce a version, such as that attempted in this volume, of the Life and Character of Douglas, is, perhaps, *obliged* to yield to such suggestions as were made, as already intimated, to the author.

Having so determined, the writer began to collate the accounts of Douglas, with a view to the intended version. As he more and more became acquainted with the *order* of events already known to him, and added to his knowledge of the early life of Douglas, the bare sense of duty grew into a pleasure. Now, he freely owns, it is a matter of *desire* to trace the outlines of the Life and Character of Douglas.

Prejudices marked the first acquaintance of the writer with the history of Douglas. Opposition to the "Little Giant" drew the author even into public prominence some years ago. And though, after that forever memorable and forever glorious twenty-second day of March, when Douglas faced the centuries with his self-vindication, prejudices fled from every discriminating mind, and he who writes this volume hastened with unnumbered others to acknowledge his correction, it was only in assembling the materials of this production that the writer began to take the true dimensions of the greatness embodied in the real life and character of Douglas.

In that real life and character is such an illustration of orderly developed strength, of constantly pursued design, of thoroughly elaborated great conceptions, as alone makes the historian proud in presence of his subject. Add to this, the exaltation won by an unfavored, young, and unimposing emigrant to a new scene of action, and you have such a life and

character to contemplate as any writer may be happy to describe for any purpose. In the simplest history of the career of Douglas, and the least idealized conception of his character, we seem to penetrate the region of romance. And though no steed caparisoned, no burnished armor, no chivalric gallantry of any kind, appear, in the historic reproduction of the life of Douglas, gallantry of a far higher order here enlists our admiration.

But the reader must not fancy that the writer is in danger of forgetting his design to make a voter's—not a poet's—version of the Life of Douglas. While no staidness of manner is intended, and while natural affection for the greatness manifested in the life and character of Douglas will be suffered its free play, this history shall constantly endeavor to support its title.

I desire, and I intend, to lay before the public a true voter's version, as already defined, of the most interesting facts composing the career and indicating the proclivities of Douglas.

Such a version ought to be acceptable to all who mean to take the least concern in the approaching contest at the polls. It ought to be acceptable at the South, because in its agreement with the real sentiment of Northern States it cannot be "incendiary." It ought to be acceptable at the North because in its whole scope and spirit it is indisposed to any sort of novel doctrine, touching slavery or any other interest. It ought to be acceptable in every division of the Union, since its principles are those on which the safeguards of the Union ever must depend.

With reference, however, to certain very public, permanently uttered, unrecanted, and, perhaps, never-to-be retracted doctrines of the writer, it may be (locally) objected, that his

version of the Life and Character of Douglas will be biased, sectional, illiberal, unfit to be addressed to South and North alike.

If objection such as this be hinted, answer may be found without offence to any, and yet with strict regard to truth.

The writer, then, in answer to the supposition of the possible objection, simply asks the Southern voter to examine all that follows ere deciding that this production is, by implication even, in fanatical contempt of constitutional considerations. Rightly understood, the record of the writer—carefully made up with reference to slavery—is equally remote from the fanaticism of the North and the fanaticism of the South. To justify this sentence may, hereafter and elsewhere, become the duty of the author. For the present, he contents himself with simply *stating*, that he never has been touched with the incendiary quality of anti-slavery opinions; adding, however, that even if the fact had been quite otherwise, he would now be ready to lay on the altar of the platform and the nomination made at Baltimore by the true representatives of the National Democracy, the offering of justly reconsidered views, of liberally moderated feeling, of an honest purpose to renounce all mere extravagance of all descriptions. If, therefore, from time to time as we proceed, the author fairly, freely, but respectfully remind our brethren of the ardent latitudes of things which they appear to have forgotten, and protest against their lately kindled scorn of things which all Americans should reverence, he will also testify, throughout, that the cotton flowers in the midst of noble virtues, and that the savanna and the prairie should be friends. While he discerns the evil of misunderstanding or of misbehavior at the South,

he will not overlook the evil of misunderstanding or of misbehavior at the North.

The rush, the ever-varying excitement, the quickly altering conditions of a Presidential Canvass, do not often favor the production of a work like that here offered to the voters of the Union.

But no Presidential Canvass, of whatever date, could ever be regarded as a simple imitation of the Presidential Canvass that preceded it. Our people, and their objects of concern, are incessantly passing into novel and, to some extent, quite unexpected conditions and relations. Even their opinions alter, necessarily, with greater frequency and greater quickness, as well as far more radically, than a superficial view of our republican experiment would be able to reconcile with rational stability of character in government or people. There is always what may be distinguished, quite respectfully, as the unfixed or floating vote, and there are always partisans unable longer to continue their support of the party theretofore preferred by them. At present, many are in the just indicated case.

And there are also at the present moment, quite uncounted, even quite undreamed of, by the politicians, men who will permit no precedent declaration of opinion or of preference, no absurd pretension to consistency, no sort of selfishness, to keep them from the ascertainment, or to shackle them in the performance, of their public duty in this year of grace and plenty. Thus, it seems quite evident, that whatever may be done by way of preparation for November, all the calculations of mere politicians will be mocked when preparation shall have ceased, and the inevitable "It is accomplished!" shall reward the patriot or curse the plotter. Seek the most capricious of the winds,

and you shall better calculate its courses than the changes which will end in blessing or in bale before the ides of March. The process of correction—self-correction—may be quiet, or the progress of fanaticism may be frantic. Decades of mere days may witness the extinguishment and the revival of the prospects now apparently the best, or now apparently the worst.

The considerations which I have presented seem to show that such a work as that here offered to the public, is not out of time. The declaration of one of our great men, that he had sworn upon the altar of his conscience, eternal hostility to every form of tyranny, is evidently applicable now to that self-tyranny, in which we sometimes mutilate the rights of conscience. No American is worthy of his rights to-day, if he permits himself to be a slave to that worst form of mental despotism, the pride of self-consistency.

There may be places, where deliberately fixed opinions, preferences, and associations, may be treated as unalterable. But in our America, all is experiment. We work out in our legislation, in our voting, in our public action of all kinds, the propositions that appear to us as principles of policy. We often find that we have been mistaken. Then, there is no time to lose. A single vote may make amendment of the error. Though we hear no magic "Presto! change!" we quickly move in the direction indicated by our wish of betterment.

However this may be in general, it must prove so at present. Here are interests inestimable exposed to peril. One ill-given vote may rend an empire. One ill-taken step may lead to ruin. One self-conquest may preserve the Union.

Sneers at views like these will hardly show their fallacy. If they are really absurd, then all the hopes, wherever enter-