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Turgenev Wallace Fonatne Sydon Freud Schlegel
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen
Weber Freiligrath Frey
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Lichtenberg Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer
Trackl Stevenson Lenz Hambroch Doyle Gjellerup
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Karrillon Reuter Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier
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Machiavelli Kierkegaard Kraft Kraus
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Nietzsche Nansen Laotse Ipsen Liebknecht Ringelnatz
Marx Lassalle Gorki Klett Leibniz
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Life of Stephen A. Douglas

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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 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 these 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 life-time 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 judgement on Douglas or his contemporaries, but to submit the evidence. Not those who write, but those who read, pass final judgement on the heroes of biography.

Chapter I. Youth.

Stephen Arnold Douglas was born at Brandon, Vermont, on the 23rd of April, 1813. His father was a physician, descended from Scotch ancestors, who had settled in Connecticut before the Revolution. His mother was the daughter of a prosperous Vermont farmer. Before he was three months old his father, whose only fortune was his practice, suddenly died. A bachelor brother of the widow took the family to his home near Brandon, where they lived for fifteen years. When not needed at more important work Stephen attended the common school. but the serious business of life was tilling his uncle's fields.

At fifteen he sought help to prepare for college. His uncle declined to assume the burden of his education and advised him to shun the perils of professional life and adopt the safe and honorable career of a farmer. The advice was rejected and he obtained permission to earn his way and shape his future. He walked to Middlebury, a distance of fourteen miles, and apprenticed himself to a cabinet maker. He worked with energy and enthusiasm, became a good mechanic and bade fair to win success at his trade, but owing to delicate health he abandoned the shop after less than two years' service, and entered the academy at Brandon, where he pursued his studies for about a year, when his mother married again and moved to Canandigua, New York. He there entered an academy and continued an industrious student for nearly three years, devoting part of his time to law study. This ended his preliminary training. He quit the schools and applied himself to the work of practical life.

In June, 1833, he left home to push his fortune in the West. His health was delicate, his stock of money scant. He went to Cleveland, Ohio, where he became acquainted with a lawyer named Andrews, who, pleased with the appearance of the youth, invited him to share

his office and use his library, with the promise of a partnership when admitted to the bar. The offer was accepted and he began his duties as law clerk. A week later he was taken seriously sick, and at the end of his long illness the doctors advised him to return home. He rejected the advice and in October took passage on a canal boat for Portsmouth, on the Ohio river, and went thence to Cincinnati. For a week he sought employment. Unable to find it he went to Louisville, where another week was spent in vain quest of work. He continued his journey to St. Louis, where he landed in the late autumn. An eminent lawyer offered him free use of his library, but an empty purse compelled him to decline the offer and seek immediate work. He went to Jacksonville, Illinois, arriving late in November, and addressed himself to the pressing problem of self-support. The remnant of his cash amount to thirty-seven cents.

Chapter II. Apprenticeship.

In those days Illinois was a frontier State with about 200,000 population, chiefly settled in its southern half. A large part of the people were from the South and, in defiance of the law, owned many negro slaves. The Capital was at Vandalia, although Jacksonville and Springfield were the towns of highest promise and brightest prospects. Chicago contained a few score of people to whom the Indians were still uncomfortably close neighbors. Railroads and canals were beginning to be built, with promise of closer relations between the villages and settlements theretofore lost in the solitudes.

Finding no employment at Jacksonville, he sold his few books to keep off hunger and walked to Winchester. On the morning after his arrival he found a crowd assembled on the street where a public sale was about to open. Delay was occasioned by the want of a competent clerk and he was hired for two dollars a day to keep the record of the sale. He was then employed to teach a private school in the town at a salary of forty dollars a month. Besides teaching he found time to read a few borrowed law books and try an occasional case before the village justice.

Having been admitted to the bar in March, 1834, he opened a law office at Jacksonville. His professional career, though successful, was so completely eclipsed by the brilliancy of his political achievements that it need not detain us. The readiness and agility of his mind; the adaptability of his convictions to the demands of the hour; his self-confident energy, were such that he speedily developed into a good trial lawyer and won high standing at the bar. That the profession was not then as lucrative as it has since become, is evidenced by the fact that he traveled from Springfield to Bloomington and argued a case for a fee of five dollars.

But his time and energy were devoted to politics rather than law. The strategy of parties interested him more than Coke or Justinian. Jacksonville was a conservative, religious town, whose population consisted chiefly of New England Puritans and Whigs. But the prairies were settled by a race of thoroughly Democratic pioneers to whom the rough victor at New Orleans was a hero in war and a master in statecraft.

Douglas was an enthusiastic Democrat and an ardent admirer of President Jackson. The favorite occupation of the young lawyer, not yet harassed by clients, was to talk politics to the farmers, or gather them into his half furnished office and discuss more gravely the questions of party management.

A few days after his arrival the opportunity came to distinguish himself in the field of his future achievements. A mass meeting was called at the court house for the purpose of endorsing the policy of the President in removing the deposits of public money from the United States bank and vetoing the bill for its recharter. The opposition was bitter. In the state of public temper it was a delicate task to present the resolutions. The man who had undertaken it lost courage at the sight of the multitude and handed them to Douglas, and the crowd looked with amused surprise when the young stranger, who was only five feet tall, appeared on the platform. He read the resolutions of endorsement and supported them in a brief speech.

When he sat down, Josiah Lamborn, an old and distinguished lawyer and politician, attacked him and the resolutions in a speech of caustic severity. Douglas rose to reply. The people cheered the plucky youngster. The attack had sharpened the faculties and awakened his fighting courage. He had unexpectedly found the field of action in which he was destined to become an incomparable master. For an hour he poured out an impassioned harangue, without embarrassment or hesitation. Astonishment at what seemed a quaint freak soon gave way to respect and admiration, and at the close of this remarkable address the hall and courtyard rang with loud applause. The excited crowd seized the little orator, lifted him on their shoulders and bore him in triumph around the square.

The young adventurer in the fields of law and politics was thenceforth a man of mark—a man to be reckoned with in Illinois.

There were scores of better lawyers and more eminent politicians in the State, but a real leader, a genuine master of men had appeared.

In January, 1835, the legislature met at Vandalia. Early in the session it elected Douglas State's Attorney of the First Judicial District—an extraordinary tribute to the professional or political ability of the young lawyer of less than a year's standing. He held the office a little more than a year and resigned to enter the legislature.

This was a really memorable body. Among its members were James Shields, afterwards United States Senator, John Calhoun of Lecompton fame, W. A. Richardson, afterwards Democratic leader in the House of Representatives, John A. McClernand, destined also to distinguish service in Congress and still more distinguished service as a major general and rival in arms of Grant and Sherman, Abraham Lincoln, an awkward young lawyer, from Springfield, and Douglas, whose fate it was to give Lincoln his first national prominence and then sink eclipsed by the rising glory of his great rival. The only memorable work of the session was the removal of the Capital from Vandalia to Springfield, and the authorization of twelve millions of debt, to be contracted for government improvements.

Douglas, who had opposed these extravagant appropriations, having distinguished himself as a debater, an organizer and a leader, was, a few days after the adjournment, appointed Register of the United States Land Office at Springfield, to which place he at once removed.

In the following November he was nominated for Congress. The district, which included the entire northern part of the State, was large enough for an empire, with sparse population and wretched means of communication. The campaign lasted nine months, during which, having resigned the office of the Register, he devoted himself to the task of riding over the prairies, interviewing the voters and speaking in school houses and village halls. The monotony was relieved by the society of the rival candidate, John T. Stuart, who as Lincoln's law partner. Stuart was declared elected by a doubtful majority of five, and Douglas, after soothing his wounded feelings by apparently well founded charges of an unfair count and threats

of a contest, abandoned it in disgust and returned to his law office. He announced his determination to quit politics forever.

But in December, 1838, the legislature began a session at the old Capital. The Governor declared the office of Secretary of State vacant and appointed John A. McClernand to fill it. Field, the incumbent, questioned the power of the Governor to remove him and declined to surrender the office. Quo warranto proceedings were instituted by McClernand, with Douglas and others as counsel. The Supreme Court denied the Governor's power of removal. The Court became involved in the partisan battle which raged with genuine Western fervor for two years.

In the early weeks of 1841, a bill was passed, reorganizing the Judiciary, providing for the election by the legislature of five additional Supreme Judges, and imposing the duties of trial Judges upon the members of the Court. Meanwhile, Field had grown weary of the struggle with a hostile Governor and legislature, and, being threatened with a sweeping change of the Court, resigned in January, 1841. The Governor appointed Douglas his successor. Five weeks later the legislature chose him Justice of the Supreme Court and presiding Judge of the Fifth District. He resigned the office of Secretary and began his judicial career, establishing his residence at Quincy.

This appointment to the bench was one of the most fortunate incidents in his busy and feverish life. He was not twenty-eight years old. Adroit, nimble-witted and irrepressibly energetic as he was, he had not yet developed much solid strength. His stock of knowledge was scanty and superficial. From force of circumstances he had devoted little time to calm thought or serious study. Early convinced that all truth lay on the surface, patent to him who had eyes to see, he had plunged into the storm of life and, by his aggressive and overmastering energy, had conquered a place for himself in the world. He was an experienced politician, a famous campaign orator, and a Justice of the Supreme Court at a period when most boys are awkwardly finding their way into the activities of the world. The younger Pitt was Chancellor of the Exchequer at twenty-three; but he was the son of Chatham, nurtured in statesmanship from the cradle. the younger Adams was Minister to the Hague at twenty-

five; but he was already a ripe scholar and heir to his father's great fame. Douglas was a penniless adventurer, a *novus homo*, with none of those accidents of fortune which sometimes give early success to gifted men.

The opportunity afforded the young Judge to extend his knowledge and mingle on terms of equality with the masters of his profession was such as rarely falls to the lot of a half-educated man of twenty-eight. He did not become an eminent Judge, yet he left the bench, after three years' service, with marked improvement in the solidity and dignity of his character.

Chapter III. Member of Congress.

The legislature met in December, 1842, to choose a Senator. Douglas still lacked six months of the thirty years required, but came within five votes of the election.

In the following spring he received the Democratic nomination for Congress and resigned his judgeship to enter the campaign. The District included eleven large counties in the western part of the State. O. H. Browning of Quincy, a lawyer of ability, destined to a distinguished political career and to succeed to Douglas' vacant seat in the Senate twenty years later, was the Whig candidate. They held a long series of joint discussions, addressed scores of audiences and so exhausted themselves that both were prostrated with serious sickness after the campaign. The questions discussed are as completely obsolete as the political issues of the ante-diluvians. Douglas was elected by a small majority.

He was in Washington at the opening of Congress and entered upon his eventful and brilliant career on that elevated theatre, though he was as yet only the crude material out of which a statesman might be evolved. He was a vigorous, pushing Western politician, with half developed faculties and vague, unlimited ambition, whose early congressional service gave small promise of the great leader of after years.

The famous description of him contained in the Adams diary relates to this period of his life. The venerable ex-President, then a Member of the House, mentions him as the homunculus Douglas and with acrid malevolence describes him as raving out his hour in abusive invectives, his face convulsed, his gesticulation frantic, and lashing himself into such heat that if his body had been made of combustible matter it would have burned out.

"In the midst of his roaring," he declares, "to save himself from choking, he stripped off and cast away his cravat, unbuttoned his waistcoat and had the air and aspect of a half-naked pugilist." With all its extravagance and exaggeration, it is impossible to doubt the substantial truth of this caricature. Adams did not live to see the young Member become the most powerful debater, the most accomplished political leader and most influential statesman of the great and stirring period that ensued.

The time was strange, as difficult of comprehension to the generation that has grown up since the War as the England of Hengist and Horsa is to the modern Cockney, or the Rome of Tiberius to the present inhabitant of the Palentine Hill. Only sixty years have passed, but with them has passed away civilization, with its modes of thought and sentiment, its ethics and its politics. The country had but one fifth of its present population. A third of our area was still held by Mexico. Wealth was as yet the poet's dream or the philosopher's night-mare. Commerce was a subordinate factor in our civilization. Agriculture was the occupation of the people and the source of wealth. Cotton was king not only in the field of business, but in that of politics. The world still maintained its attitude of patronizing condescension or haughty contempt toward the dubious experiment of "broad and rampant democracy." Dickens had just written his shallow twaddle about Yankee crudeness and folly. Macaulay was soon to tell us that our Constitution was "all sail and no anchor." DeTocqueville had but recently published his appreciative estimate of the New World civilization. Americans knew they had less admiration than they claimed and had lurking doubts that there was some ground for the ill-concealed contempt of the Old World toward the swaggering giant of the New, and a fixed resolve to proclaim their supreme greatness with an energy and persistence that would drown the sneers of all Europe. It was a time of egotism, bluster and brag in our relation to the foreign world, and of truckling submission in our home politics to a dominant power, long since so completely whirled away by the storm of revolution, that it is hard to realize that half a century ago the strongest bowed to its will.

Douglas was in no sense a reformer or the preacher of a crusade. He was ready to cheerfully accept the ethics of the time without

criticism or question. Political morality was at its nadir. The dominant power of slavery was not alone responsible for this depravity. The country was isolated from the world and little influenced by foreign thought. Its energies were devoted to material aggrandizement, to the conquest of Nature on a gigantic scale, to the acquisition of wealth. Since the settlement of the Constitution moral problems had dropped out of political life and the great passions of the heroic age had died away. Education was superficial. Religion was emotional and spasmodic. Business ethics was low.

Party politics was in a chaotic condition. The Whig organization was not in any proper sense a party at all. It was an ill-assorted aggregation of political elements, without common opinions or united purposes, whose only proper function was opposition. It was so utterly incoherent, its convictions so vague and negative, that it was unable even to draft a platform. Without any formal declaration of principles or purposes it had nominated and elected Harrison and Tyler, one a distinguished soldier and respectable Western politician, the other a renegade Virginia Democrat, whose Whiggism consisted solely of a temporary quarrel with his own party. The one unanimous opinion of the party was that it was better for themselves, if not for the country, that the Whigs should hold the offices. The Democrats had been in control of the Government for forty years. Their professed principles were still broadly Jeffersonian. Their platform consisted mainly of a denial of all power in the Federal Government to do anything or prevent anything, the extravagant negations borrowed from the republican philosophers of England and the French Revolutionists.

But a half century of power had produced a marked diversion of practice from principles, and, in spite of its open abnegation of power, the Government had become a personal despotism under Jackson, which had vainly struggled to perpetuate itself through the Administration of VanBuren. But notwithstanding the absurd discrepancy of their practical and theoretical politics, the Democrats had one great advantage over the Whigs in having a large and influential body of men united in interest, compelled to defend themselves against aggression, prepared unflinchingly to take the initiative, to whom politics was not a philosophic theory but a serious matter of business.

The slave-holding aristocracy of the South was the only united, organized, positive political force in the country. With the personal tastes of aristocrats and the domestic habits of despots, they were staunchly Democratic in their politics and had full control of the party. They had positive purposes and aggressive courage. A crisis had come which they only had the ability and energy to meet. The control of affairs was in the hands of the timid Whigs. Decisive measures were needed. By a peaceful revolution they seized the Government out of the hands of the Whigs in the midst of the Administration and embarked on a career of Democratic conquest.

President Tyler, having quarreled with his party, eager to accomplish something striking in the closing hours of his abortive Administration, with unseemly haste rushed through the annexation of Texas under a joint resolution of Congress. Mr. Polk, the new President, did not hesitate in carrying out the manifest will of the people and the imperious behest of his party. The South was clamoring for more territory for the extension of slavery. The West was aggressive and eager for more worlds to conquer. New England, impelled by hatred of slavery and jealousy of the rising importance of the West, opposed the entire project and earnestly protested against annexation.

In the feverish dreams of the slavery propagandists rose chimerical projects of conquest and expansion at which a Caesar or an Alexander would have stood aghast. Mexico and Central America were contemplated as possible additions to the magnificent slave empire which they saw rising out of the mists of the future. They began to talk of the Caribbean Sea as an inland lake, of Cuba and the West Indies as outlying dependencies, of the Pacific as their western coast, and of the States that should thereafter be carved out of South America. The enduring foundation of this tropical empire was to be African slavery, and the governing power was to rest permanently in the hands of a cultured aristocracy of slave-holders. The people of the North-Atlantic States and heir descendents in the Northwest, who churlishly held aloof from these intoxicating dreams, were to be treated with generous justice and permitted to go in peace or continue a minor adjunct of the great aristocratic Republic. Already the irrepressible conflict had begun.

Douglas heartily accepted the plans of his party. He was by temperament an ardent expansionist, a firm believer in the manifest destiny of his country to rule the Western Continent, a pronounced type of exuberant young Americanism. He was an unflinching partisan seeking to establish himself in the higher councils of his party, which was committed to this scheme of conquest. On May 13th, 1846, he delivered in the House a speech, in which he defended the course of the Administration in regard to the Mexican War and, in a spirited colloquy, instructed the venerable John Quincy Adams in the principles of international law. He based his defense of the war upon the treaty with Santa Anna recognizing the independence of Texas. Adams suggested that at the time of its execution Santa Anna was a prisoner incapable of making a treaty. Douglas insisted that, even though a captive, he was a de facto government whose acts were binding upon the country, and to establish his proposition cited the case of Cromwell who, during his successful usurpation, bound England by many important treaties. The niceties of international law were not very punctiliously observed. His arguments were warmly received by men already resolved on a career of conquest.

The war was a romantic military excursion through the heart of Mexico. There were battles between the triumphant invaders and the demoralized natives, which were believed entitled to rank among the supreme achievements of genius and courage. Americans had not yet acquired that deep knowledge of carnage, those stern conceptions of war, which they were destined soon to gain. Military glory and imperial conquest have rarely been so cheaply won. The war gave enduring fame to the commanding generals and shed a real luster over the lives of thousands of men.

The material results were stupendous. We acquired nearly twelve hundred thousand square miles of territory—a region one-third larger than the area of the United States at the close of the Revolution. The extravagant dream of making the Pacific the western boundary of the Republic was realized and no one seriously doubted that this vast domain was surrendered to slavery.

