

MISCELLANEOUS.

FREDERICK DOUGLASS ON TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE AND VICTOR SCHOELCHER.

POSTHUMOUS PUBLICATION COMMUNICATED BY THEODORE STANTON.

[The following pages, here published for the first time, were written by the late Frederick Douglass, when he was United States Minister to Haiti. They were intended to form the Preface of an American edition, which was never issued, of a Life of Toussaint L'Ouverture, by the late Victor Schoelcher, of the French Senate, the liberator of the slaves in the French Colonies.—*Theodore Stanton*. Paris, May, 1903.]

The lesson taught by Toussaint L'Ouverture should not be lost on the oppressors and persecutors of the negroes of the Gulf States of our Union to-day. There may arise other men of that race not less brave or less fertile in resources than this hero of Santo Domingo. In the language of Thomas Jefferson it should be remembered "That the Almighty has no attribute that will take sides with the oppressor in such a contest." The world to-day is more sympathetic with those who rise against oppressors than when this man led the revolt against slavery in Haiti. The whole Christian world was at that time against him. England, France, Spain, Portugal, the United States, and Holland were all slaveholding. They could only look with horror upon a great negro leading his class in rebellion for its freedom. There was neither sympathy nor justice for the black insurgents. The moral weight of the world was against them.

The countrymen of Toussaint do not always stop to consider that his errors, if errors they were, should be regarded but as dust in the balance compared to the great services he rendered and the lustre he shed upon the character of their race. His high character, his valor, his wisdom, and his unflinching fidelity to the cause of liberty are an inheritance of which his people should be proud. His lot, however, is not singular. Men are often loved least by those they have served best.

The mountain sin of slavery has disappeared from the nations and in every land the negro has now his friends and advocates. An uprising against oppressors and murderers would not in this age be viewed as it was viewed a hundred years ago. Tyrants and oppressors may well take this change of the world's thought into account. There may be a revolt against the spirit of slavery as well as against slavery itself. That deadly spirit is at bottom of the persecution of the freedmen of our Southern states and men are often amazed that this possible resistance has not already been by it developed.

I have spoken of some difficulties in the way of giving a fair account of the

life and works of Toussaint L'Ouverture. These have all been well surmounted, I think, by the author of this book on Toussaint, who has well observed the injunction of Cromwell, "Paint me as I am," and faithfully portrayed the black patriot, soldier, and statesman. He has given us the most complete and trustworthy account of Toussaint yet placed before the public. He has neither made his hero too great to obtain belief nor so small as to excite contempt. The age is rational and things must be reasonable to gain acceptance. Beyond the measure of the simple truth there is nothing even sensational in this volume. Neither is there any straining after effect. The character of the author made the appearance of this weakness impossible. It is the work of a venerable statesman, a member of the French Senate, one far removed from vain ambition and whose life is already crowned with honors that place him beyond the range of temptations before which other men might fall.

Mr. Schoelcher is not only aged and venerable but he has behind him a long line of valuable services to his country, and to mankind. It has been given to him as it has been given to few reformers to see some of his most radical and deeply cherished ideas accepted by his countrymen and organised into law. Such a man is not likely to give us fiction in place of historic truth.

The present volume may be fairly taken, as I have no doubt it was intended to be taken, as the crowning work of the life of its author. To my simple view he could have performed no service more valuable to the African race or to mankind than the one here completed of refreshing the world's memory of a great man whose example is still needed by the oppressed people with whom he was identified. The world has had at best only glimpses of Toussaint. In this volume it will get a full and fair view of him.

No man of to-day was better qualified for this work than M. Schoelcher. His career began when the memory of the life and deeds of Toussaint were fresh. He read and heard all that was said concerning him and has well remembered what he read and heard. His young heart was doubtless early touched and his sympathies excited by the misfortunes of the black soldier and statesman, and he naturally enough was eager to know all that could be known about him. His work before us may well enough be taken as the labor of love and truth.

While, however, he has spoken well of his hero and of the African race, he has not flattered the vanity of the negro by attributing to his hero higher qualities than he was known to possess;—and yet he has withheld no fact in his career, which sheds lustre on his memory, and honor upon his race. In a word we have here an honest biography of an honest man.

As a philanthropist M. Schoelcher is to France what Wilberforce and Clarkson were to England and what Lincoln and Sumner were to the United States. The position of France on the subject of negro slavery is honorable to her high civilisation, and for this position she is indebted to no man more than to Victor Schoelcher. To him more than to any other statesman of his time is due the act that freed France from the shame and guilt of negro slavery. He had the wisdom to see what should be done, how it should be done, and the time at which it should be done. Many a golden opportunity is lost on some low ground of fancied expediency or lack of manly courage. In the case of M. Schoelcher, neither of these hindrances came between him and manifest duty. In him the hour and the man were well met. The story of his agency in the abolition of slavery in the French Colonies will be better told by his biographer. I will only add that when every throne in Europe was shaking and Louis Phillippe found it necessary to flee from

France, amid the tumult of that stormy period M. Schoelcher found time to urge upon the Provisional Government of France the abolition of slavery in all her colonies. Nor did he urge this measure in vain, for his hand was the hand permitted to open the decree by which slavery ceased to exist in every part of the dominions of France.

It was my good fortune, for so I certainly esteem it, while in Paris four years ago, to have had several memorable interviews with the author of this book. I was first introduced to him in the Chamber of the French Senate by Mr. Theodore Stanton and on several occasions afterward met him at his own house. To say that I was very much impressed by his appearance and interested in his conversation is to say almost nothing of what I really experienced. I look back to my calls upon him as among the most interesting of the many interesting ones it has been my good fortune to make upon public men. At the time I met him M. Schoelcher was already eighty years of age, yet the real living active man was there, and fully abreast with the demands of his time and country. Had he been in middle life, he could not have been more truly alive than he was to passing events at home and abroad. Like many other European statesmen he was deterred from labor neither by declining health nor weight of years, nor seemed to have any more idea of ceasing work than if forty years rather than eighty had been his actual age. It was here that I learned his purpose to write the life of Toussaint, and heard his announcement with some amazement considering the many demands upon his time and considering his advanced age; but he, better than I, knew the amount of work he could yet accomplish. I then ventured to promise that in case his biography of Toussaint should be published in the United States, I would write an introduction to the work, but with little expectation that I should ever be called upon to perform this grateful service.

Much that I then learned of the life and works of our author must be left to his biographer, but I may mention the surprise I felt in finding in Paris such a house as his. The room in which I found myself seated and where M. Schoelcher keeps his busy hand and brain at work was largely decorated with the emblems of slavery. There were old slave whips, which had been used on the backs of slaves in the French Colonies. On the walls were handcuffs, broken chains, fetters, and iron collars with sharp prongs which had galled the necks and limbs of despairing bondmen, but which now gall them no more. These barbarous implements of a past condition were sent to M. Schoelcher by negroes from the Colonies in grateful recognition of his instrumentality in setting them free. One could easily see that the venerable liberator looked upon these iron testimonials with a sense of relief and satisfaction. There were not wanting other and more valuable tokens of negro gratitude to this noble philanthropist, grateful evidences that he had not lived in vain. In these, Martinique and Guadeloupe were well represented. Better these than all the laurels gained on the field of battle and blood. They tell of those victories more renowned in peace than in war, and to which man may look without any heart-piercing thoughts of slaughter and the ten thousand horrors of war.

Several colored members of the Chamber of Deputies called upon Senator Schoelcher on the mornings of my visits. I was pleased to observe that his manner towards them had in it no show of patronage. He received them as one gentleman should receive another, with dignified cordiality. They came, I believe, to consult their venerable benefactor in respect to measures then pending in the Assembly of which they were members. Their manners plainly told that they had the fullest confidence in the wisdom of their adviser.