

FROM SLAVE TO CONSUL-GENERAL.*

THE book noted below is the biography of a most remarkable man. Born a slave, kept in servitude till his manhood, with no school education, earning his living by the sweat of his brow and by the sweat of his brain, he became one of the most popular and eloquent of platform orators, a successful editor, a potent factor in the emancipation of his race, United States marshal in the District of Columbia, and United States minister and consul-general to the Republic of Hayti. The excellent portrait accompanying the volume exhibits a strongly-marked intellectual face. His complexion is very dark, but his face lacks the typical Negro cast.

"It has been a source of great annoyance to me," says Mr. Douglass, "that I never had a birthday." He was born in 1817, but no one knows the day and no one knows his father's name. "Such trifles as this," the biographer remarks, "were seldom recorded of slaves." He was early made acquainted with the cruelties of slavery. He saw his aunt receive thirty or forty stripes, each of which drew screams and blood. Others of his kinsfolk were beaten to death. The rations of an able-bodied slave were a quarter-of-a-pound of bacon, a peck of coarse cornmeal and a little salt each week. Young Douglass used to fight with the dogs for the crumbs which fell from the table, and, with a dozen other children, eat out of a trough like pigs. His mother lived at a plantation twelve miles distant, and sometimes walked four-and-twenty miles in a single night to see her child. His last remembrance of her was falling asleep in her arms. Before he awoke she had to go back to her work, and he never saw her again, for he was not allowed to stand beside her dying bed.

"When I was nine years old," he wrote in mature manhood, "I was just as well aware of the unjust, cruel, murderous character of slavery, as I ever became." He became a house-servant at the age of nine, and for the first time heard the Bible read. He was anxious to learn to read for himself, carried a Webster's spelling book in his pocket, and bribed or coaxed, with cents earned by blacking boots, poor white boys to teach him the letters. He used to scrawl letters with chalk on boards, and challenge the white boys to do better, or to show him other letters. He thus learned to read and, in time, to spell his way through the Bible and Methodist hymn-book. His literary aspirations were nipped in the bud as soon as his master heard that he was learning to read, by the total prohibition of that privilege.

As the lad grew up he experienced "conversion" at a Methodist camp-meeting, and helped to teach in a Methodist Sunday-school, but a ruffian mob put an end to that career of usefulness by breaking up the school. He was kept at work from early dawn to almost midnight in the fields, and under a cruel master was brutally beaten almost every day for six months. Douglass says it was then, if at any one time more than another, that he was "made to drink the bitterest dregs of slavery. A few months of this discipline tamed me. I was broken in body, soul and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed, my intellect languished, the disposition to read departed; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me, and, behold, a man

* *Frederick Douglass, the Coloured Orator.* By Frederic May Holland. Pp. 423, with portrait. New York: Funk & Wagnalls. Toronto: R. Berkinshaw, 86 Bay Street, and Methodist Book-Room. Price \$1.50.