

critic? He can, of course, number the specks, but his principal task is, on the one hand, to clear a path for the normal mind to those "life chairs," and on the other to moderate the recurrent enthusiasm for facsimiles. Chapman did this notably about Stevenson, at the height of the latter's popularity. Without contempt or lack of sympathy for Stevenson's real gifts, the critic weighs the product of their application and concludes: "The truth is that as a literary force, there was no such man as Stevenson; and after we have racked our brains to find out the mechanism which has been vanquishing the chess players of Europe, there emerges out of the Box of Maelzel a pale boy."

I have quoted enough to show that Chapman himself had a share of that power which can do without copying models and hoarding echoes. His prose is light and strong, and finds images without poeticizing, just as it leaps connectives surefootedly. Occasionally choppy in his essays for fear of academicism ("gamboge and style, with its however's and moreover's and semicolons"), Chapman in his letters never deviates from perfect informality — the rarest of all literary gifts. This, if we can trust our stated preferences, ought to make him reasonably popular today. But we must remember his stand on intellect. "We are ungrateful," he says, speaking of William Lloyd Garrison, "to the intellects of the past. . . . Yet everything we know and live by is due to the mind of someone." We who might be his readers may assent to this proposition, but we do not believe it literally and viscerally. We think that what we know and live by was put

on the market, some time back, by General Electric — and that they are probably working on an inexpensive "life chair" even now.

Besides, Chapman cannot be popular so long as he remains what he is, a master of concise commentary. Though he knew much — because he knew much — his mind was not a tureen of facts periodically ladled into a book. His aim was to convey general truths; not to inform, but to reform by awakening and compelling reflection, like Balzac's residue. Unhappily, we are not used to this discipline. We have commentators, but it is notorious that they are not allowed to comment. They give us the low down, and we have a tendency to stay right there with them.

Yet all these reasons why Chapman is not ready-made to our tastes are as many reasons why we should take up and read him — against the grain perhaps, at the outset, but not for long. He is not beyond us, nor are we beyond him. The resistance we oppose to the re-examination of our past and its buried treasures may be simply a symptom of the fatigue induced by too much relaxation in front of a box with a dial on it. In imitation of the box, our best authors have got into the habit of telling us that their ideas are easy, that the last thing they expect from us is an effort. No wonder we yawn before we are hurt. By contrast, it might be fun to stiffen the dose once in a while and try the effect of a tonic. Who knows? — there might even be a virtue in it from the point of view of national morale and the social capacity to conduct our affairs with intelligence.

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## FREDERICK DOUGLASS

by ROBERT E. HAYDEN

WHEN it is finally ours, this freedom, this liberty, this beautiful and terrible thing, needful to man as air, usable as the earth; when it belongs at last to our children, when it is truly instinct, brain-matter, diastole, systole, reflex action; when it is finally won; when it is more than the gaudy mumbo-jumbo of politicians: this man, this Douglass, this former slave, this Negro beaten to his knees, exiled, visioning a world where none is lonely, none hunted, alien, this man, superb in love and logic, this man shall be remembered — oh, not with statues' rhetoric, not with legends and poems and wreaths of bronze alone, but with the lives grown out of his life, the lives fleshing his dream of the needful, beautiful thing.

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