

MEN OF MARK:

Eminent, Progressive and Rising.

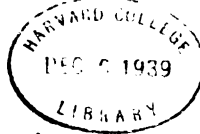
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WITH AN INTRODUCTORY SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR BY REV. HENRY M.
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Illustrated.

CLEVELAND, OHIO:
GEO. M. REWELL & CO.
1887.

US 10796.30
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XCIII.

REV. HENRY HIGHLAND GARNET, D. D.

Minister Resident of Liberia—Distinguished Minister of the Gospel and a Brilliant Orator.

HENRY HIGHLAND GARNET was born in slavery in Kent county, Maryland, December 23, 1845. Although his father, George Garnet, was a slave, his grandfather was an African chief and warrior, and in a tribal fight he was captured and sold to slave-traders who brought him to this continent where he was owned by Colonel William Spencer. With the love for liberty burning in his veins, George Garnet could not endure the chains that fettered his life, and he planned a scheme to save his whole family from the galling yoke of slavery. He obtained permission from his master to attend a slave's funeral in Wilmington, Delaware, and he took his wife, son and daughter to that place where they remained one night under the watchcare of Thomas Garrett, a Quaker, celebrated for his aid to fugitive slaves and aiding them to go to Bucks county, Pennsylvania. In 1825 Mr. Garnet removed his family to New York City. From the father the son received much of his strength of character and love of knowledge; from the mother, a notable candor, intellect-



HENRY HIGHLAND GARNETT.

nal face, and the bright, keen laughing eye. With such an inheritance, together with physical greatness, the subject of our sketch could not but possess such traits as we find in him and made him beloved by all who had the pleasure of knowing him and feeling his power.

In New York Mr. Garnet entered the African free school on Mulberry street and became the schoolmate and friend of many distinguished colored men whose names shall live in history, namely: Professor Charles L. Reason, George T. Downing, Ira Aldridge, the great tragedian, and others whose names are equally familiar. The privations of his family compelled him to discontinue school for a time, and he spent two years as cabin-boy. On one of his visits home he found that his father's family had been scattered by the inroads of Maryland slave-hunters. This painful news, although at first it nearly broke the young man's heart, proved the turning point of his life. He sought and found refuge and strength in his crucified and risen Lord, and he joined the Sunday school of the First Presbyterian church, under the pastorate of the celebrated Rev. Theodore S. Wright. Soon after he was baptized by this minister and became an earnest worker for the cause of Christ.

In 1831 a high school was established by leading colored men in New York for the pursuance of the classics, and Garnet was one of the first pupils. In 1835 the Puritans in New Hampshire, desiring to enlarge the cramped facilities for Negro education, opened a High school in Canaan, New Hampshire, and Garnet, still eager to feast on what his mind had only tasted, although physically very weak and feeble, started with two other friends to find what he hoped

would gratify his intellectual hunger; but alas, the few colored boys were too much for this New England State. The New England Democracy declared the school a nuisance, and after a few weeks the farmers in that vicinity moved the school a great distance from its original site, simply because it was, as they termed it, "a nigger school." This attempt at knowledge proving a failure, he returned home so infirm that his life was often times despaired of. After remaining for a few months at home, information was given that Oneida Institute at Whitesboro, the manual seminary, had opened its doors for colored youth. Thither Garnet went, and in 1839 he graduated with distinguished honor and began a public life. He first settled at Troy, all the time studying theology with Dr. Beman, and acting as secretary to the colored Presbyterian church. He was licensed to preach in 1842, and became the first pastor of the Liberty Street Presbyterian church of that city. This charge he held for ten years, during which time he published the *Clarion*.

Garnet was a remarkable man. In his school life he always led his mates, and through life he always desired to be in advance, notwithstanding the hindrances his feeble health caused, for he was a cripple at fifteen years brought on by white swelling. He was earnest however, in the prosecution of everything he undertook. He afterwards had his leg amputated in 1841, and it was owing to this that he survived so many years thereafter. He was a great sufferer, but patient under all. He perfected in himself a rigid and rare mind, teeming with brilliancy and wit, mingled with pathos. This man possessed wonderful abil-

ity for holding audiences spell-bound; his pure English, deep thought and manly dignity in anti-slavery movements were often in demand. He was active and progressive in everything. His speeches were made with such powerful effect that their force could never be put in print. He was a man of strong feeling and a true heart, and in speaking reached the inner nature of men. Many of his speeches can never die, and it is a shame that they cannot be gathered up and preserved as English classics.

In 1850 he visited Great Britain and there, in assemblies, he won the hearts of the people and charmed them with his eloquent language. From England he went as delegate to the Peace Congress at Frankfort-on-the-Main, and thence he traveled through Prussia and France. For a brief time he went as Missionary to Jamaica, stationed at Sterling Grange Mill in that place, until ill health forced him to return home. In all he undertook he was successful, and every work flourished under his care. He was one of the first during the Rebellion to call young colored men to arms, and he became chaplain to a regiment of colored troops. He organized a committee for the sick soldiers and was almoner to the New York Benevolent Society for colored sufferers of the mob. It was only providential that he himself escaped the wild fury of this maddened crowd. During his life-time he was president of Avery College in Pittsburgh, for about three years. He was induced at one time to pastor a Presbyterian church in Washington, District of Columbia, and was the first colored man to preach in the capital of the United States. He returned to his early love, Shiloh church, in New York,

however, and was pastor of it for twenty-six years. In 1842 Garnet was married to Miss Julia Williams, who had been a classmate at Canaan Institute. He had cherished for a long while a desire to visit Africa, and when an offer was made of position of Minister Resident to Liberia, notwithstanding the grief of parting with friends whom he never met again, he gladly accepted the offer, and on the sixth of November, 1881, he preached his farewell sermon at Shiloh church, New York City, to the people he had loved so long and well, and whose hearts were stricken because of his retiring. On the twelfth of November, he sailed for England and arrived at Monrovia, December, 28. He lived but a short time after he reached his fatherland; but his life will ever be an inspiration to the young men of the race, as a type of what a sainted life might be and how men may, by their own energy and personal efforts, rise to lofty stations among their fellowmen. He died in the land of his fathers and as Alexander Crummel, D. D., has said, "they buried him like a prince, this princely man, with the blood of a long line of chieftains in his veins, in the soil of his fathers. The entire military forces of the capital of the republic turned out to render a last tribute of respect and honor. The President and his cabinet, the ministry of every name, the president, professors and students of the college, large bodies of citizens from the river settlement, as well as the townsmen, attended his obsequies as mourners. A noble tribute was accorded him by Rev. E. W. Blyden, D. D., LL. D., one of the finest scholars and thinkers in the nation. Minute guns were fired at every footfall of the solemn procession. And when they

laid him lowly in the sod, there was heard on the hills, in the valleys and on the waters, the tributary peal of instantaneous thunder which announced through the still air the closing of the grave. There he lies, the deep Atlantic but a few steps beyond, its perpetual surges beating at his very feet, chanting ever more the deep anthems of the ocean, the solemn requiem of the dead."