

THOUSANDS MOURN AT BIER OF EDITOR ABBOTT: NOTABLES AND LOWLY IN FINAL TRIBUTE

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Notables and Lowly In Final Tribute

By DAVID H. ORRO

With lowering clouds suspended in Chicago's slate-gray sky of Monday morning it would seem that even the heavens joined in mourning, as 10,000 persons thronged Metropolitan Community church and spilled along South Parkway to pay final tribute at the bier of Robert Sengstacke Abbott, editor and publisher.

The founder of the Chicago Defender died at his home, 4742 South Parkway, early on the morning of February 29, bringing to a dramatic close a life filled with scintillating achievements motivated not by a goal of self-gain, but by a wholesome determination to champion the cause of an oppressed people.

An indication of how thoroughly he fought that fight for social and economic equality for his people through medium of the mighty institution he founded, was seen Monday, etched in grief upon faces of the multitude that attended his last rites here in Chicago.

The body of the 69-year-old journalist lay in state at the Abbott home from 9 a.m., Saturday until the remains were moved to the church at Forty-first street and South Parkway, Monday.

Only a small few of the thousands who attended services were intimately acquainted with Mr. Abbott, and not many more had actually ever met him face to face, but so dynamic was this great character, so keen his faculty for reaching out and finding that common ground on which to commune with, and aid the oppressed masses, that not one soul in that vast assembly felt himself a stranger in this hour of trouble.

Other stories and pictures on death of Editor Abbott will be found on pages 7, 8, 9, and 12.

And so, fully an hour before Rev. Archibald J. Carey arose to introduce the first speaker, the spacious horse-shoe balcony was dressed solidly from rail to wall with sorrowing friends of the greatest Race newspaperman of all time.

By 11 a.m., the huge auditorium was packed solidly—, a sea of human faces ranging from the purest black to the purest white, for Editor Abbott had recognized no barriers in that unrelenting campaign for a glorious ideal: Justice and Equality.

Eulogy in Song

As the eyes of this multitude fixed upon the little ebony-hued giant, serene in his final slumber amidst floral splendor beneath the speakers' dias, mourners suddenly became aware that 50 white-robed choir members were opening services with a hymn!

The initial strains were so soft, so subdued, so unobtrusive that even with the low dreamy notes from a gigantic organ it had to gradually dawn on this assemblage that they were listening to a beautiful rendition of that time-revered song, "Lead Kindly Light."

As the crescendo gave birth to audible words of the hymn and the

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Thousands—

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choir rounded out and then concluded the offering with a divine finish that stirred the soul, one was inclined to whisper: "Perfect!"

"Perfect!"

At sound of the word one might have been startled, upon gradually realizing how close to a eulogy the rendition of that hymn had been! It began, but nobody was aware a song was being sung! As it swelled in volume and caught the ear, listeners became intent; grew tense and strained to catch and appreciate its every note and word!

Here was something masterful; magnificently executed; intended for them, the masses, in this hour of darkness. And suddenly the song was ended. So grandly, and yet so quietly ended, it left its listeners subconsciously regretting the vacuous silence that followed.

"Perfect!" one repeated. Perfect for this solemn occasion. Perfect in its beginning; in its triumphant duration; in its termination! Perfect because it so faithfully portrayed the life of the man whom it honored in this instance, but whose ears heard it not.

Mayor Kelly Speaks

There followed in orderly succession three tributes in addresses by Atty. James B. Cashin, Atty. Patrick B. Prescott, and Lucius C. Harper, the latter managing editor of the publisher's monument to a well-spent life — The Chicago Defender.

Next to speak was Mayor Edward J. Kelly of Chicago, who paid a splendid tribute to Mr. Abbott whom he termed a close friend and one whose achievements and ideals must place him among immortals of the Race.

Rev. Albert Windust, chairman of the National Assembly of Bahai's of Chicago, of which Mr. Abbott was a member, delivered an address followed by Rev. Joseph Evans, pastor of Metropolitan Community church. The obituary was read by Dr. Charles M. Thompson. Ritual of the Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity, of which the publisher had been an honorary member since 1923, was then performed.

Rev. Preston Bradley, pastor of the Peoples church, Chicago, paused in midst of his remarks; and as the sun broke momentarily through the clouds for the only time during the entire day, casting a halo from off the shimmering gloss of the bronze casket, he observed: "So now even Nature tarries at this moment to pay her respects to the memory of this great man—Robert Sengstacke Abbott."

Reverend Carey in Tribute

Then came Reverend Carey to deliver a eulogy that left nothing wanting. So finely, so kindly, so eloquently did this red haired son of the late Bishop Archibald J. Carey Sr., symbolize the life of Robert Abbott, dean of Race journalists, that many present felt on the point of belatedly cheering the departed editor, publisher, humanitarian, for his valiant fight against appalling adversities.

One came to fully realize, under pressure of Reverend Carey's presentation, the true magnitude of Editor Abbot's self-abnegation and devotion to an ideal.

As echoes of this fitting tribute died among the polished rafters of Metropolitan Community church, the casket, followed by the family and relatives of the editor, was borne towards the exit while the choir in subdued tempo, rendered "Last Mile of the Way."

Thus it was that the body of Editor Robert S. Abbott started on its journey to the grave; his soul prepared to meet that final "deadline" with Almighty God.

Amen.