

(A biographical sketch of William Perkins Black by his wife Hortensia, printed in *The Society*.)

Captain William Perkins Black

“Yes, he stood there alone trying to right the whole rebel force, whilst Charlie lay like dead at his feet; and he thought his brother was dead. The order to retreat had been given, but Cap never heard it; if he did he didn’t obey, and when the rest of us got safe behind the fences we looked back and there was Cap standing all alone firing at the Rebs. A shout went up from the troops and the Johnnies echoed it, and stopped firing in very admiration; and then Cap ran to drag Charlie back.”

That was the first I ever heard of my husband. In the city of Houston, Texas, a Union officer related the above in my hearing. The speaker was ardently attached to Captain Black, and becoming a great friend of mine prevailed upon him to inaugurate a correspondence with the permission of my parents, which after three years led to our marriage in the city of Galveston, that fairy isle of the Gulf.

The character indicated by that little sketch tells his history. His father and mother had been pro-slavery, and their happiest days had passed in the Southern homes; and in Woodford County, KY., Will was born; yet he left college when Sumter was fired upon to join the Union army as a private. When the war had accomplished its end, and only the gathering of honors remained, Captain Black returned home after three and a half years continuous service. Read law, whilst tutoring for the means of livelihood in a family near Chicago, was admitted to the bar and speedily became partner in an old prosperous firm of the City by the Lake, succeeding to the distinguished Judge Arrington as partner to Judge Dent.

Then came his marriage – marriage to a woman with whom he had only spent three days the year previous to Friday, May 28, 1869, on which date the marriage occurred, performed by a Catholic priest. Dr. Johnson, head of St. Mary’s College, Galveston; for he was marrying one as ardent in Catholicity as he was in his Presbyterian fold.

The children consequent on this union perished early, two little girls in their babyhood and four boys prematurely borne from this world, consequent on the mother’s grief for those earlier lost.

Religion naturally at this juncture performed an important part; and an order, commonly the effect of bereavement, drove Mr. Black into almost severe evangelical labors. But humanitarian more than theologian, he chose the missions among the poor for his field, and preached for three years at Rail Road Chapel, the mission of the wealthy. First Presbyterian Church, in order that old “Father Kent” as he was called, might continue to draw his scanty salary instead of being ousted in his old age by some theological student from the seminary, as was proposed.

But becoming disgusted with the narrowness of church bondage, Mr. Black, though he had been elected an elder in his church, resigned that position and finding he could not

conscientiously remain in that church of the rich, asked to have his name dropped from the roll, and upon his insisting, the ministers, who but the day previous had plead with him to remain, publicly excommunicated him, very much to Mr. Black's amusement at this feeble imitation of Rome's fulminating powder.

The subject which then began to interest him was Socialism, the cry of the people. He often said in those days, that it was like the approaching roar of a lion, that it was coming up to the very church doors. Mr. Dent, his partner, had purchased and loaned him Viletard's History of the International, which he carefully perused.

It was while my baby Rosebud lay dying in the Palmer House that the five thousand starving men of Chicago surrounded the Court House and demanded bread – and bread was given them; but oh, how the iron was entering the souls of the poor with that reluctant dole!

One day Mr. Jackson, who was a candidate, asked Mr. Black to go for him to see some of the labor leaders. In those days all labor agitators were Socialists, and not afraid or ashamed of the name, as they seem to be now. So, the two gentlemen went on the search for Socialists. I can best describe the result in my husband's language, as with eager vehemence he told it me that night:

“Darling, I've been on a visit to the gnomes! I went with Jackson to find the Socialists leaders. We were directed down underground, where we found two men with faces and hands as black as the ace of spades! And they were not negroes either, but just laboring men, engineers running machinery. But oh, you ought to have heard those men talk! They told me about the working people's condition” – here his voice began to quiver – “they told how men were selling their labor for starvation wages, and women their bodies for life;” and here he put his face in his hands and his whole frame shook with emotion. “They gave the figures, the data, the statistics. I never heard men talk so eloquently I wish you could have heard them. Oh, there is more to this question than I ever dreamed of!”

Those men – those underground gnomes – were John McAuliffe and George Schilling. McAuliffe, black-listed and hopeless, took his own life. George Schilling, black-listed, but of more hopeful disposition, is fighting on labor's line tonight at the Knight of Labor Convention. Schilling came to see us, and brought us that wonderful book, “The New Incarnation.”

I wonder if everybody has read that book? We did, and through our tears beheld the long night of the toiler.

Society then began to find Captain Black “queer.” Religious people began to doubt his religion – especially when he delivered several lectures before the philosophical Social and the Liberal Union, one on “Socialism” and one on “Nihilism.”

The latter has been translated into other tongues and circulated in almost all lands, and yet both lectures were from a student's, not an adherent's standpoint. About that time, 1882, Mr. Black, perceiving the political breakers ahead, permitted his name to be used in the race for Congress in the Third Congressional district of Chicago against Geo. R. Davis, the present City

Treasurer, accepting in the first instance the nomination of the working people, to which was added later those of the Independent Republicans and the Democrats. I went one night to hear him speak, and I knew that Aristides had a better chance in Athens than the author of such a speech against monopolies, corporations and combinations of wealth, as he that night uttered, in Chicago.

On election day the very men who had clamored most over his nomination – the Democrats – put Geo. R. Davis' name on their ticket, and fooled the voters with it. Even Carter Harrison, who had been around making speeches with Mr. Black, laughed at the trick as a good joke, and the regular tickets with Mr. Black's name, on them were found hidden away by the police, evidently acting under orders. Certain of the Republicans and Democrats had entered into a trade whereby McGarigle, now in Canada, was to be elected by the Republicans sheriff, and the democrats were to vote for Davis. The Democrats "delivered the goods," but the Republicans as usual, stuck to their own man and elected Hanchett, predecessor of the present incumbent, Canute Mattson.

The faces of the wealthy men who listened to the speech on the occasion referred to said very plainly, "You are not our tool." Though Frank Collier, the bearer of English-Chicago compliments to Queen Victoria, sprang on a bench and waving his hat cried out, "Three cheers for Captain Black," I thought a good deal, as I saw written on R. T. Crone's face, as if he had said it out alone, "Oh! he's weak, it don't matter what Collier does."

By the way, I saw Collier do the very same act when the jury brought in the verdict in the Anarchist case, jump on the bench and wave his hat hurrahing; and I guess my face spoke as Crone's did.

There came family troubles after the political defeat of the sore affliction of his beloved mother who, in gradual softening of the rain, slowly and painfully ebbed out of existence mentally and physically years dying. A grand, proud, intellectual woman.

And, as the years passed by, having removed to the country, Mr. Black in personal sorry lost sight of the great approaching conflict.

Entering Chicago on May 5, 1886, I opened the Tribune and read out the heading, "A night in hell." Then followed the description of the Haymarket police attack on the people there assembled, and the destruction by the bomb, in front of R. T. Crone's foundry.

As we walked by the Central Station, which is in the Court House building, we saw patrol wagons driving up with prisoners, and great was the excitement. I had read it aloud, the account, with frequent ejaculations of horror; but Mr. Black exclaimed:

"I don't believe the story of it as there stated. That paper lies so you can't believe it."

But during the day came other tidings, and the dreadful times had begun in earnest. The actual war of Capital on Labor had been inaugurated by a conspiracy of rich men, which future years will anathematize.

The right of terror was in Chicago, not of canaille over the noblesse but of the noblesse upon the teachers and leaders of the canaille. One could not go through the street in those days without witnessing cruelties; and one day when a wealthy young lady rushed into the office fairly crying as she told what she had seen: two burly policemen with a poor negro in the patrol wagon, beating him over the head whilst the blood streamed down; it was difficult to restrain one's indignation.

"Why," said Miss R. through her tears, "I thought it was a dog at first, till I saw the poor bleeding negro put up his hands."

Day after day – day after day, and Mr. Black went to the mayor, who coolly informed him that he had given the police carte blanche, and they could do what they pleased. Then we wondered they did not act worse.

But who would stand by this oppressed and beaten Israel? Who would dare, in the teeth of capital – teeth, fleshed and bloody from rending the poor – to plead for labor? Was it not so dark an hour that even Peter had denied his friends? Aye! Had not the workman declared he never knew these men about to be placed on trial for their lives? With many an oath I grant you!

Quietly, fearlessly, George Schilling came to Mr. Black one day and said:

"They will not even allow poor Fielden to have his wound dressed, and I've come to get you to go see him, and take his case."

Does the reader know what that meant? The opposite of Satan's temptation on the pinnacle of the Temple. It was saying, "are you willing to sacrifice all life's prospects to serve justice? Will you lay down a life's ambition rather than sacrifice eight men, although but two of them are known to you and that but slightly?" And Mr. Black said, "I'll let you know in three days. I am not a criminal lawyer, and hesitate at the responsibility."

He spent those three days trying to find some experienced criminal lawyer to share the labor with him. In vain. All such lawyers shrank from that case as from the leprosy. I spent the three days trying to get him not to take the case, but to help in other ways. I counted the cost.

At the end he said to me solemnly, "I must take it. I can do no other wise, God helping me. A great wrong has been done. I must do all I can to make it right."

And then he began this fight for life. Everything else had been subordinated. The thought of those eight sufferers, shut in from the air and sunshine to narrow confines of a dark and dreary dungeon with the shadow of a cruel death falling athwart their path, and the bitterness of the desertion, the ingratitude, of those toilers who join their masters in the cry, "Crucify our friends! We give you leave – we desert them to your tortures." These thoughts have been his spur day and night. More and more silvery has the hair grown, clustering above the flashing eyes, whose fire never burned more brilliantly than on those days when, speaking for seven

hours, he dared to thrust the accusations of the prosecution back upon them, and held up these Labor Leaders and Labor Lovers, not for apology, but to a world's admiration.

All fell on cold, unheeding hearts – hearts that had taken counsel before to slay these men, and who were not ready to drop their prey till forced to let go by some need of their own.

That brainless jury of dudes passed sentence on men they could not comprehend.

Unbaffled – full of confidence that Justice yet held her abode somewhere among men – tirelessly, Mr. Black appealed to the higher Court of the State, only to find that, like to Judge Gary, they simply acted as lawyers for the prosecution, and penetrated deeply the realms of the imagination to find excuse for affirming the action of the lower Court.

There is a legend that long ago, when brave men contended for the helpless and oppressed, a woman high in rank, and theretofore of reputation spotless, had become the target for men's scorn unjustly; yet even the king, her spouse believed her guilty.

Then passed those authorized to do so sentence that she should die a hideous death for her disloyalty.

The day of execution came, when lo! A knight appeared upon the scene in harness, accoutered full for battle, and, to the amaze of all, challenged belief in her guilt to fight. So many set upon him that the knight was wounded sore, yet would not yield; and by the law of that land's code the death was stayed until his wounds should heal and he be strong enough to enter lists again.

And on the day appointed came the doomed accused, and came her knight and challenged her accusers yet once more. Then far more lustily than first the lady's foes, increased in number, fell on the knight, and all but hewed the life out. Still, he maintained her innocent.

Again, the fatal day came round, and came the gallant knight with stronger weapons and more full of loyal faith in that fair queen's unspotted virtue. Again, he flung his glove to all in challenge; but lo! What stir is this? From the entrance to the field the bugle sounds the coming of another knight upon the ground. Advancing in view, the knight and all behold, almost with fear, a massive form in powerful armor clad. Sadly, the good knight takes his leave of Hope, when lo! The stranger lifts his visor, and the fickle multitudes behold the king. He speaks, addressing reverently his own queen's champion: "Friend and defender of her I love, thy faith hath resurrected mine. Back to my all repentant heart I call my suffering love, and on this bosom offer her atonement from the altar of faith rekindled from the fires of thine. And thou her friend when all forsook, be still her friend, and aye my honored guest."

Oh, may this legend set in homely phrase find realization in this case. May the king – the true sovereign, the people – come to the rescue of these, the unjustly accused; and now, at this hour, ay the working-men of America, of all lands, cast aside the cloak of cowardice and stand up manfully protesting their faith in the innocence of our men (that is what we call them). What a deliverance would this effect!

What a coronation to him who loves them as my husband does the toilers of the earth.

Do you think, I have drawn a fancy sketch of my husband's character.

Listen then to what was written of him by a leading Republican capitalist during the campaign of 1882 in assigning his reasons for voting for Mr. Black.

“Speaking from a person acquaintance of years standing, the writer, if asked would say of Captain William P. Black, that he would bring to the legislative office a heart throbbing, with a benevolent love for his fellow man, sympathetic with their misfortunes and ambitious to be of service to them a quick and enlightened conscience with a profound service of personal responsibility; an independence in thought and action almost phenomenal; an honesty deep seated as the earth's foundation; an incorruptibility, absolutely unassailable; an intellect of great breadth and keenness; a mind well stored with a comprehensive knowledge o law and history; a ripe and widely varied experience; an eloquence at once dignified and impassioned, impressive and graceful; a patriotism strengthened and purified on the battle fields of the Rebellion, and a courage which cannot be daunted; a life so pure and spotless that the fierce breath of a bitter canvass has cast no mist upon it; a religious principle which manifests a reverent regard for all the ways of righteousness; a widely gathered familiarity with the management of affairs, and a broad, general culture, a splendid presence and manners courteous, affable and polished.”

This as the outspoken published summary of Mr. Black's character in 1882; this was what men thought of him before he took the Anarchist case. He is the same man now with the same nature, and the qualities which made men praise him then are the very ones that prompted him to defend the Anarchists.