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“ON THE SHORT LIFE AND DEATH OF DICK PARKER”

July 1934 by Harry Fisher

“There are times when circumstances so control the destinies of men that death lifts from obscurity sterling characteristics of golden promise in the unfolding process of development. A vivid confirmation of this truism was exemplified at the funeral of Richard Parker. Just one week ago this boy of twenty was a buoyant spirit approaching the threshold of a brilliant career, where success was wholly dependent on his own endeavor.

He was no pampered son of wealth, yet no Potentate was accorded more sincere and greater homage than was shown as the mortal remains of Dick Parker were being borne to the grave. Whether it was an ominous foreboding that Dick Parker joined the I.L.A. on the thirteenth of May must remain an unsolved problem, as he was assigned to picket duty at the stockade, where strike-breakers were being quartered in contravention of the articles governing the city's leases. During the night additional numbers appeared to discuss a demonstration for these Labor Hessians that might fill them with fear of numbers and thus cause them to leave whether it be called persuasion or by some other names. It was no doubt their sole purpose to impress on the strike-breakers that mercenary myrmidons were not welcome here. At the first indication of a demonstration, the private guards opened fire on the unarmed strikers and in the fusillade seven men were shot. One of these, shot through the stomach, is now hovering between life and death. It was the irony of fate that Dick Parker, who had just joined the union, should be the one to die, by being shot through the heart.

What manner of man was he that he did not cringe before the menacing fire until he was laid low by an assassin's bullet? I wanted to learn more and visited his home at 339 West O'Farrell Street in San Pedro.

Mr. Parker inquired about my credentials and said that, since the tragedy, so many people had called that he must know their mission before engaging in any discussion. When he was convinced of the honesty of my purpose he called Mrs. Parker to answer questions that I assured him would be few in number. I stated that I had not known Dick personally and that I would be pleased to see some pictures of him as a background in referring to his life. As a longshoreman and dressed as such, I stated that I felt some diffidence about an extended interview and that I would not detain them long, but Mr. Parker assured me that he, himself, was an automobile mechanic and that they would gladly receive any working man whose motives they believed to be sincere.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Parker had been getting out the records that would supply the information I had requested. She handed me the birth certificate which showed that Richard Parker was born on Tuesday, October 9, 1913. She showed me the record of his baptismal in the Episcopal church. She showed me his picture at the age of nine, dressed in tucked-in trousers. She showed me a newspaper page with its galaxy of graduates of the class of 1931 in the San Pedro High school. She pointed to the picture near the lower right, across which was written 'Dickie.' She explained that to the family he was always known as 'Dickie.' It all seemed so strange that I marveled at her self-control and I was impressed by the thought

that this boy had a wonderful mother, indeed. She told me that Dickie confided in her and gave her all his wages.

On his last job he earned seven dollars. 'He was a good boy and gave me the last money he earned.' Then, as in the loneliness of a desolate soul, something in the region of her heart must have snapped, as she suddenly turned to hide from me her tears of anguish.

I felt something rising in my throat and I reached out to grasp their hands as I said that I thought I had better go. All the wiles of the Merchants and Manufacturers and kindred anti-union combinations can never make me believe that such an upstanding, American, he-man lad could have had malice in his heart as he stood in the line of that murderous barrage of gas and bullets, on the night of May 14. I think I know the true mettle of this boy, now.

I also know something of the pusillanimous cravens that would hurl gas bombs into an unarmed gathering, which a sudden change of the wind turned into a boomerang.

I was at the corner of B and Avalon when the driver of a sedan asked where the emergency hospital was, as he had a blinded gas victim with him. A bystander suggested that I go with the car.

I did not know the victim and asked him how it happened and this was the answer, uttered between spasmodic moans: 'I was a deputy and only did my duty. I did not want to hurt anybody but I had to obey orders.' To me this sounded like the whining squeak of a cringing mouse. Men do not talk that way.

When I mentioned the incident to some of our boys I expected to receive censure, but I was told that we are human beings and broad enough to show commiseration for even a fallen foe.

If that deputy can see enough to read this now he should thank the I.L.A., although I suspect he might sneak up on me some dark night, when the wind is in his favor.

From what I now know of Dick Parker, I know he would neither talk nor act that way. Could he return for a moment to read this story he would offer a protest against my failure to share my tribute with his fallen comrades, who are now in hospitals.

Such is a hero's death. Well, 'Dickie,' you are in good company with Galileo and Socrates and Savonarola.

Richard Parker's body was sent to Los Angeles for the inquest and a jury heard testimony that only one shot was fired and that shot was fired into the air. The men who were shot in the legs and stomach will find this hard to believe.

The funeral had been announced for 2 o'clock Monday, May 21, from the Cleveland Undertaking Parlor. At 10 o'clock I viewed the body and at 2 o'clock I again marched past the bier to seek in the closed eyes inspiration to tell the story. In the pallor of a rigid countenance I could glean the sublimity of victory even over death."

Fraternally,

Mark A. Mendoza
President

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