

Tequesta

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Frank Bryant Stoneman

by MARJORY STONEMAN DOUGLAS*

WHO'S WHO IN AMERICA says: "Stoneman, Frank Bryant, editor, born, Indianapolis, Ind., June 26, 1857, son of Mark D. (M.D.) and Alethea White S. Educated, Carleton College, Northfield, Minn., and University of Minnesota. Married Lillian Trefethen of Taunton, Mass., June 12, 1889 (died, 1912) one daughter, Marjory. Married second, Lillias E. Shine of Orlando, Fla., April 14, 1914. Admitted to Florida bar, 1896. In newspaper business in Florida since 1901; vice-president Herald Publishing Company, Herald Holding Company, Democratic presidential elector for Florida, 1904, judge of Municipal court of Miami 10 years, member Dade County Bar Association, Episcopalian, Mason; past grand commander Knights Templar of Florida, past grand high priest Royal Arch Masons of Florida. Clubs, National Press, Washington, D. C.; Rotary club, Acacia club. Home, 701 N. W. 9th Avenue, Miami."

HOW CAN such dry details give the measure of a man? There is nothing in them of the color and vigor of the times that he has known, of nights, noons and mornings that have shaped him subtly, nothing of the character by which he was recognized or the influence which he carried with him, walking quietly and straightly in these beloved streets.

He was known and unmistakable; the six feet of his height topped by the crest of hair still gray in back, the craggy jut of his Roman nose, the direct look of brown-hazel eyes, young live eyes, that watched with humor and with tolerance the endless parade of human folly and of human grief. Try lying to those eyes, however, and watch them turn cold granite.

When I remember him first he wore one of those brown walrus moustaches much affected by young men from the West. But old photographs show the sensitive lips of a boy grown up early in a frontier world. Like his ancestors, he was always to be a pioneer, like those

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early Stoneman scholars and doctors maintaining their own thoughts, taking their own plain Quaker way, unaffected by the turmoil of new cities boiling about them.

To trace that in him you have to go back to old James Stoneman, living on the Thames river in England, after 1735, who found fellowship for his own stiff back among the Society of Friends. England had no place for men who chose to worship the God of Quietness directly, in their unheard-of way, so that James arrived in Virginia with some batch of evicted Quakers, his Roman nose stiffly facing west. There was starch in him also, for he carried a musket with the militia. He married a Quaker woman, practiced medicine in one of those early Quaker communities where the first schools in this country were maintained, and begat Joshua. Joshua was another doctor, married Elizabeth Davis of Montgomery county, Virginia "after the manner of Friends." She was a daughter of another fighting Quaker, Mark Davis, a lieutenant in the Revolutionary war. Their son, Mark Davis Stoneman, was to find the western urge too powerful to be resisted longer. The country was too full. He took his diploma in medicine in the early days in Cincinnati, Ohio, married a Quaker, had a second son, Frank Bryant Stoneman, served as surgeon in the Civil war and after the battle of Shiloh moved west, with his young family, to the new town of St. Anthony, on the Mississippi, now Minneapolis.

So that our young Frank had as his earliest recollections the rumor of the war, the long trek westward, the trip by slow-pushing flatboats up the Mississippi, the muddy streets of little St. Anthony and a great flight of passenger pigeons, darkening the air. There were Indians in the dark forests beyond and famine possible in the 40 below zero winters. But there were Friends in St. Anthony and his father could settle down to his doctoring, rude enough in those rude days.

Our man was brought up like any Quaker boy of his time in spite of the fact that he did not belong to meeting. It may have been a frontier town, but there was strict tradition to guide him, the tradition of "Yea and nay," the tradition of plain living and clear and independent thinking, and there were family stories to point up the stiff-backed breed. They may have been plain people but they were colorful.

There was Uncle Levi, for instance. Uncle Levi was a great old Quaker. He had traveled widely in Europe, on some Quaker concern. Back in Indiana he had maintained one of the stations of the Underground railway, shipping hundreds of escaping slaves to Canada. One evening

he was standing at his gate when a young colored fugitive, ragged and breathless, limped by. Uncle Levi with one jerk of his thumb motioned him inside. A few minutes later a posse hunting him stopped at his gate. "Did you see a fugitive slave around here?" they asked him. "Yes," said Uncle Levi stoutly, "a young negro just passed this gate." The posse went on, but Uncle Levi's wife, having settled the fugitive in the clean room out back, heard her husband's reply. "Levi, thee has told a lie," she said, very shocked. "He passed this gate," Uncle Levi said calmly. "He passed it coming in."

But I like the one best about Uncle Levi's hat. You can imagine the great grey Quaker brim, well worn and brushed. Uncle Levi had some occasion to testify in a court trial. In the courtroom he wore his hat. Uncle Levi paid no attention when the bailiff said, "Take off your hat." The bailiff said again, "Take off your hat." "Friend," said Uncle Levi, "I have worn this hat before kings and I intend to wear it here." The bailiff snatched it off. Uncle Levi eyed him calmly. "Friend," he said, "thee can put it on again." And the bailiff did.

There was always that Quaker touch about Frank B., the plainness of his speech, his hatred of profanity and gaudy statements, his unpretentiousness, even his grey suits. But another strain accounts for the occasional mild red tie, a French strain, that came into the family with the Bondurants, Huguenots, this time. There was a sword in that tradition, and a long yarn of a Bondurant adventurer who fought with the Swiss against the French kings and went to England before sailing, in his turn, to America. If you watched the Stoneman hands you would see that in moments of oratory they jerked in emphasis. He told it himself that once in making a speech to a congregation in Miami's colored town he grew lavish with his gestures and a fat mammy on the front seat began to roll and shout, "Hallelujah." The French strain may account also for the fact that as a young man he astonished the family by joining the Episcopal Church. The color of the ritual, the nobility of that service, second only to the King James version as fine English evidently proved relief from plain Quaker ways and pioneer harshness. The rites of the Ancient and Accepted Order of Masons must also have offered much the same rich color and sense of formal tradition in a pioneer world.

But within the family house itself there was no lack of the books which were always to provide for him education, recreation, escape and study. No Quaker family of that day would be without them.

Schools in the pioneer town of St. Anthony, with its three thousand people, were plentiful, but there was no perceptible system. So that the Stoneman boys and girls passed at will from school to school. The family library and reading aloud in the evenings of the long winters made up for everything. His love of history may have begun then, listening to his mother reading aloud from the little red Abbott histories of Marie Antoinette and Peter the Great. They read "The Prince of the House of David" and Pope's Iliad and Odyssey and "The Report of the English Commission of the White Slaves of England" and "Incidents of the French Revolution." He was supposed to have read Josephus at the age of seven.

Hunting and fishing were all about the small town in abundance and the Stoneman boys were early accustomed to the use of firearms. They chopped wood and fought both the uptown boys and the downtown boys. The older brother, Orville, was the aggressive one, fighting at the drop of a hat, and it was long-legged Frank, who had to rally to his defense, fight off the assailants and bring the wounded warrior home. His nickname was always "Ben" because they said he always had his nose in a book like Benjamin Franklin. It stayed there all his life.

He went to the University of Minnesota in its infancy and then to Carleton College in Northfield, where he was a classmate of Thorstein Veblen. He had even then the idea of reading law.

But in the vacations the smell of printer's ink captured him for life. He got a part-time job in a print shop and learned to hand-set type with the best, among the shifting, rare population of old-fashioned journeymen printers of that day. Always later, when he was in doubt of the spelling of a word, he could think how it would feel to pick the letters out of the case. He was for years in Miami very proud of being an honorary member of the Typographical union. He began his journalistic career as a boy by printing his own newspaper, one of the first junior papers in Minnesota. At the same time, he wanted to be a lawyer.

But his father died in 1875 and he went to work, school teaching first in one of the earliest Swedish communities in Minnesota. After that Uncle Luther Johnson sent him and young Fred Johnson out to the new town of Billings, Montana, to open a grocery store. Billings was then 1,000 miles ahead of the Northern Pacific railroad, a sure-enough frontier town, Indians, emigrants, cowboys and all. Frank grew that

mustache, learned to wrap beans or brown sugar in a flat piece of paper and dole out five dollars worth of flour, dollar by dollar, to some befeathered Indian. But better than that, he had a lot of real hunting, rode all over the Bad Lands, shot his bison and saw the town fill up. He is still remembered in the Billings Lodge of Masons.

Then the boom in the northwest began rolling up, not unlike Miami in '25. He went back to Minneapolis and into business, married, had a daughter and very shortly saw the panic of '93, which upset all that country and taught him lessons which were to be invaluable to Florida later. It took a panic to shake him loose from those cold winters. Then for the first time since 1750 a Stoneman set the prow of his nose to the South.

Florida was being much spoken of, in those cold and shattered northern lands. Cuba, restive under Spanish rule, might have possibilities. He made a trip south to Tampa, Key West and Havana, where the Spanish army strutted its colors along the Prado and for the first time the tropic sun baked the long Stoneman bones. It was an unforgettable impression. The grey and crowded East held nothing like that for him. The cities were too finished. There was nothing there for a pioneer to do.

So he came to Orlando in Florida in the old days when the great live oaks shadowed quiet streets and in the country round about the orange groves roofed the white sand roads with shadow. He saw the freeze of '94 devastate the country, houses left standing unpeopled, food on the tables, with the exodus of the ruined. There was talk of the railroad going farther south than Palm Beach and a frostless country below there, where this town of Miami huddled, a few shacks among the untrampled palmetto, where the river flashed lonely under passing flocks of parakeets. He started raising chickens outside Orlando and studying to pass the Florida bar exams. It is recorded that the chickens died, but the exams were successful and he moved into town to practice law. Then printer's ink came into his life again. Some unfortunate job printer in Avon Park could not pay a bill for legal services. Lawyer Stoneman took an ancient flatbed press for the debt, had it hauled to Orlando by ox team and found his right hand moved readily between upper and lower type cases and the printer's stick in his left. The old press made a newspaper man of him, for life.

Now by this time the railroad had gone to Miami. The Florida East Coast railway was dominating Dade county politics. It was real pioneer

country, in contrast to the leasured leafy streets of Orlando, within sound of cathedral bells. So he and a man named LaSalle brought the old press down to Miami, where surreys stood under fringed canopies by John Seybold's bakery and the Sewell Brothers were going into business and Isidor Cohen had dried out that first stock of goods he had dumped into Miami river and was looking upon the new town with brown and cheerful eyes. LaSalle and Stoneman set up a job printing shop and a four-page, sticky little paper, first called the Record, and then, taking over a dying and now forgotten sheet called the News, named it "The News-Record." His purpose was to drive the railroad out of politics

The old News-Record put up a stiff fight. The Florida East Coast was less active in politics, but the paper almost died of it. Meantime, there was a lot of work not associated with a newspaper for an Episcopalian and a Mason. At one time he was a lay reader for the church and was the only man who could bury people with the Episcopal church service, up and down the coast. Another time he was taking charge of Masonic funerals, and Masonic charities, walking gravely and calmly, while the new town boiled with energy and the Florida East Coast extension drove southward over the Keys.

The early News-Record was a slim and leisurely sheet, covering with well turned periods the fact that wire service was non-existent and news none too lavish. Father Friend, the beloved old priest of the Catholic church, planting the first bucidias in the Catholic yard, which he smuggled in from the Bahamas, gossiped with him of an evening on his boarding house verandah. Mrs. Krome, a bright-eyed girl, then, heard their slow voices arguing church history and who wrote Shakespeare, while the saloons were being moved to North Miami and someone argued that some day there would be houses on Miami Beach. Our man gave the first dollar for the establishment of Jackson Memorial hospital, as a member of the first hospital committee. He visited the sick. He served sometimes on the municipal bench, sentencing drunks rolled across the Miami line from North Miami saloons back on the job again. The small paper and job press business struggled along.

It was difficult to get from him any complete picture of those days. In the courthouse there was a trial of a negro behind whom sat a man with a drawn knife, prepared to slit the negro's throat, if the verdict was "not guilty." There were parakeets still in the grapefruit trees in

Coconut Grove, then spelled "Cocoanut Grove," an almost unknown village, a long buggy ride away. Collins bridge stretched across Biscayne bay and frame buildings were thicker along Twelfth street. People said some day there would be 10,000 people in Miami, believe it or not.

There were hurricanes, when the corrugated iron roofings spun along Miami avenue and the young palms thrashed and pine trees went down as far north as old Johnson street. The Presbyterian manse stood white among these new young trees. Dr. Gifford had introduced the quick growing Australians and there were revivals and prohibition campaigns and Masonic ceremonies at Christmas. The long-legged Quaker boy who had gone on studying history in 40 below zero winters in Minnesota watched the pageant of the streets with a glance lifted from more history books, reading Thackeray always when there was nothing else to read, and going back to history, any kind of history, but always American history, as if he found in that longer view meanings making themselves plain in the new town here.

For the story of his days after the founding of The Miami Herald, with Mr. Shutts at the business helm, one must go to the files of The Herald. He worked late at night in all those early years and at last walked home at 1 o'clock at night to the Sutcliffe apartments among the scent of night-blooming jasmine and the pale blossoms of that tremendous cereus vine, to his new wife, Miss Lillias Shine, of Orlando. An old Florida gentleman, hearing they were to be married, offered the last word on Miss Lilla. "Stoneman," he said, "you're marrying the finest damn woman in Florida." He never contradicted it.

Nobody but a Mason could write the story of his work for Florida Masonry. The very list of offices he has held one hesitates to copy for fear of inaccuracy. But the fore-and-aft hat with the feather that made him look like Admiral Farragut has covered a lot of secrets of good works, as carefully hidden as Masonic secrets. Nobody, I suppose, really will ever make a complete list of those quiet deeds. But every now and then some oldtimer turns up with gratitude still in his eyes.

His record on the Miami municipal bench, where he took a fiendish delight in fining his friends for speeding or passing lights, fought for 10 years a steady battle to clean up colored town, met with steady eyes the whole petty and whining and seamy tale of a growing town's misdemeanors, and maintained justice and order with a dignity and simplicity worthy of the highest courts of the land, stands fixed. Yankee

women, having heard wild tales of the South's injustice to negroes, came into morning court often to witness horrors with their own eyes. They never failed to speak to him afterward. "Why," one woman said, "you treat negroes and white people with exactly the same justice, Judge Stoneman." He said, "Madame, that is the purpose of this court."

Two stories, one a breach of confidence in the telling, point up that 10 years as well as anything else. He came back to Miami after a vacation one year, and drove blindly across a stop light. The officer, after blowing his whistle shrilly, recognized him and apologized. "Make me out a ticket," Stoneman said grimly, "I never noticed that light at all." "Oh, that's all right, Judge," the officer said. "I wouldn't give you a ticket." He insisted. The case was entered on the docket, called next morning. He pleaded guilty, fined himself and paid the fine. They do say it was a great help to the force after that, in the matter of other public officials.

Here comes the breach of confidence. The people who really were terrorized by the presence of Judge Stoneman on the bench were employes of The Herald. He had issued orders that every one of them had to be absolutely above suspicion. A Herald employe, arrested, was a graver offender than anyone else. If that was unjust, they could make the most of it. On one occasion a Herald boy was arrested driving on the wrong side of the street taking another boy, seriously injured, to the hospital. The boy, in the court next morning, pleaded guilty, but told the story. The other boy had arrived safely at the hospital even after the arrest. But the boy was guilty and Judge Stoneman fined him. The secret leaked out around the Herald later. The Judge paid the boy's fine himself.

When he retired from the bench, because of temporary illness, it was with deep regret. The police force didn't like it either. They kept his hospital filled with flowers and one of his most prized possessions was a silver vase sent him by the wives of the policemen, the auxiliary to the police department. Always thereafter when you saw an oldtime member of the police force stiffen suddenly into a salute slightly modified by a broad and affectionate grin, you could note a quiet gentleman in a grey suit by the name of Stoneman, going down to buy his daily cigars at the corner drugstore, with a bright eye still for the proper conduct of the boys.

There are more stories than I can possibly tell. There are more than I have even heard of. It is difficult for me to speak flatly of the things

I know about him. It is silly to remark, for instance, that he was the most honest man I have ever heard of, because dishonesty was inconceivable to him. You cannot say that justice was a passion with him, because it was so much more than that. It was the breath of his way of thinking and of the manner of his speech, as it was of those fighting Quakers, who gave him the color of his eyes and his way of walking. That he was alive to the real meaning of democracy and of the United States of America, that its constitution, the forces and ideas which created it, were living forces to him, is also an understatement. Few men I have ever met saw so clearly what this country is all about and feared so little that it should fail in its destiny, of liberty and justice and democracy. It was to him a destiny always to be striven for, possible as a result only of eternal vigilance, and the best intelligence of thoughtful men.

It is an almost impossible thing to present the character of a man in the round, especially as the specimen presented had so rich and mellow and well-stocked a mind, so clear and yet so subtle a personality. As his sole descendant, it is doubly difficult. But there is one tribute to his work which I should like to make as a follower of his craft. In a pioneer town like Miami, when an editor writes what amounts to miles of words every single year, what the town sees plainly is the ideas presented, the thought which, day after day, is written. How it was written not so many notice, yet few editors of his day owned such a perfect fusion of matter and manner, which we call style. It would seem at first that his writing had a total absence of manner. But when you studied it day after day and year after year, you saw that he wrote one of the most beautiful English prose styles possible. It owns not a grain of affectation. There were no tricks, no elaborations, no non-essentials in his sentences. It was prose as fine and crystal as brook water, and as refreshing. It flowed daily in the columns of *The Herald*, unfailingly easy, accomplished, diversified. But clear, clear, always, with that quality of quiet luminescence that alone emerges from such clarity. He had no idea that it had a manner in itself. It was only the way he thought. But that is also the way of greatness.

Some years ago he was one of a group of 30 editors from all over the country to be sent to Europe by the Carnegie Foundation to make a study of European conditions. I think that the high moment of the trip for him came when he was to make a speech in Westminster Abbey, on the presentation of a wreath at the grave of the Unknown Soldier.

I should like to have heard that speech. His forebears had been kicked out of England as a penalty for thinking for themselves. He was not unaware of that, standing with bared head before the great grey arches.

I think he knew quite a pleasure in finding himself a witness there, for the country which that same toughness and wilfulness for freedom had helped found. I think he was a pledge, and knew himself to be, that in his country thought would maintain its own freedom, whatever the difficulties of the years to come.

He wrote me a letter that night about the Abbey service, which I shall always keep. He said nothing much about the speech itself. But in a postscript Mrs. Stoneman wrote in her own comment. "P.S.", she wrote, "Frank did very well." I think we'll let it go at that.