William, or prejudice against color —

Stories for children

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William Sr on prejudice against color.

During the winter of 1862 & 3. I commanded the 2nd Division 2nd Corps. We were encamped near Falmouth about a mile north of the Rappahannock. It was after General McClellan had been relieved from the command of the army and when the prejudice against the blacks ran high. A young man who came out as an officer in a Maine regiment, made great ado about the president's freeing the slaves and declared that he would never serve in an Abolition army. He was brought before a court Martial for using disloyal language and some other like offense and dismissed the service. In another regiment, where all but one or two of the officers were German, one of them a young American was loud and vociferous in his denunciation of the government, the President, the general commanding the

army — because they were turning a war for the preservation of the Union into one for setting the slaves at liberty. This young man was also put under charges, brought before a court-martial and dismissed from the service. ~~[illegible]~~. After these eminent cases I heard very little in our portion of the army which could be seized upon for the sake of discipline but there was a wide-spread feeling of discontent, & some ~~deep~~ murmurings deep if not loud against the "accursed negroes", who, if we could believe the grumblers, caused all the hardships & brought upon us all our woe.

The first Minnesota regiment of Volunteers was stationed a little to the North of my tent which constituted my winter quarters. The field officers of the regiment had some good horses. They were wont every day to ride past my tent going back & forth. ~~[illegible]~~ Generally a handsome mulatto boy rode one of them. He was a youth of some 18 years, of fine figure, pleasant face & manners, & well clad for the part. Don't ~~[illegible]~~

The lad was somewhat vain & a little pompous at times. Certainly he appeared very proud when he was mounted on that good horse. He appeared to advantage even when he had only a saddle blanket under him.

One day as he rode past some Irish soldiers I heard one of them cursing that "nagur". "The scalpin of a black nagur shall never ride & have me walk, Sure an there's good stuff in me rifle!"

I thought it was only talk and only laughed at the man's expression.

But very soon after this as William was riding just at the foot of the steep south of my tent, moving along at a slow trot, sitting with erectness & displaying the grace of his horsemanship, a shot was fired from amidst a small group of men. William was hit beneath the shoulder & would have fallen had he not been caught by some one near him. I ran out at the outcry that followed the shooting to see what had happened. The lad had been taken from his horse & was being carried gently toward the Minnesota hospital. He looked up cheerfully in my face

~~as I got to him.~~ ~~at my salutation~~, and said that he was badly wounded but he hoped he would get over it. I do not remember his words, but I remember his bright, cheerful face and how brave & hopeful he then was.

He was taken to the hospital & put in with the sick men of the 1st Minnesota. He was always treated kindly there. The surgeon took the utmost pains to save him, but his efforts were of no avail, he lingered a few days and then died. No harsh word fell from his lips. He spoke kindly of the enemies of his race. He had a sweet christian life & died with the indescribable joy in his heart.

We searched long for the murderer but he was covered by his regiment & could not be found. He knows & God knows that he is a wicked murderer.

The death of this youth whose only offense was the color of his skin, made a strong impression in our camp. We knew that the time was not far off when

Slavery would go to the world - but
we said, how can our Father use
such instruments as these, whom
this murderer, his companions and
abettors so markedly typified? This incident
showed us how poorly united we then
were to see more the real cause of our
sorrows - our nation's curse, human bondage.
But how hopeless to Stephen must
have appeared the cause of his master
from any human stand point when
Saul ~~held~~ kept the clothing of his murderers,
while they were stoning him to death!
Is'nt it a picture: "And they stoned Stephen,
calling upon God and saying Lord Jesus,
receive my spirit!
And he kneeled down & cried with a loud
voice, "Lord lay not this sin to their
charge." And when he had said this he
fell asleep.
The same observing friend, carried poor
patient William into the company of
the angels when his color is no offence.