

clerk was thought of as the highest of achievements. I didn't even entertain the possibility of being chief clerk or superintendent; such positions did not occur to me as even remotely attainable. So a good deal of what holds a person back (and I do not mean spiritually) is himself, as he has been put to bed by his parents and their environment.

Lack of opportunity caused me to leave that small town in the Rockies. However, I don't think I have been as happy since, even though I have held positions in the engineering and management hierarchy. But even with such success and even though I am white, I have been held back by certain institutional prejudices and practices.

I recall applying for a position for which I was rather admirably suited. It was with a sugar company with headquarters in the Rockies, and a position with them would have meant going home. But the flesh peddler whom this corporation had hired and imbued with various parameters for screening aspirants turned me down. Why? Not because I wasn't qualified. That was never a consideration. It was because I wasn't making enough money. Another time I was interviewed by the manager of a grocery market who wanted to hire me, but the division manager would not let him because he felt I was too old. I was forty-five.

If these things rile me, how must all the institutions and prejudice of the white power structure rile the Chicano or the Black American?

Judging from what I saw at the Student Union that night, I guess I'm one of the enemy from the standpoint of the Chicano and Black American. The enemy are the sleeping masses of middle-class, white, middle-income U. S. Citizens. We pledge liberty and justice for all but cannot seem to translate that pledge satisfactorily into practice. That's the message I got that night from the satirical skits at De Anza Junior College.

I shook hands with my Black Brother the other day. You know, he had five fingers on his hand just like me. Who is he? Who am I? He's like me. I'm like him. We're brothers. We're brothers. We're brothers. This I know, we're brothers!

MY FATHER'S SIX WIDOWS

Samuel W. Taylor

In view of the fact that my father had sacrificed both worldly goods and his chances in heaven for the dream of the great patriarchal family, it is ironical that the only time all six of his wives met face-to-face was upon the occasion of his funeral. Unrelenting Gentile opposition to the Principle had made his dream of the great family clan impossible, while the spirited independence of the wives kept them at arm's length. These were not submissive harem women; they had been the most venturesome and courageous lovelies of their day, embarking on a way of life in full awareness of the sacrifices and hardships required. Yet this very independence of spirit had prevented the final requirement of the Principle, that they should come together in harmony as sisters.

The six widows, clad in black, sat in proper order on the front row. May, serene and regal, was the legal Mrs. John W. Taylor, the only one to use that name. Nellie, the Canadian wife (the one allowed there, where authorities were unconcerned with a man's marital status so long as only one wife set foot on Dominion soil), was tall and slender, vivacious and dramatic. She was John's public wife at church and social functions, the one who accompanied him on business trips. Nettie (my mother), was a small girl with great eyes, a broad forehead, and a wealth of auburn hair. She had been christened Janet Maria, but her underground name became so firmly fixed that she used it throughout life. Nettie was the homemaker; when John wanted good food and rest, a refuge from business and public affairs, he always came to her home. Roxie and Rhoda were sisters who stayed in Mexico during the underground period. Roxie was shy, very soft-spoken, with an elfin loveliness. In contrast, Rhoda was a robust and vital beauty, full of spirit and full of fun. These sisters by blood came nearest of the wives in being true sisters in the Principle. On moving to Provo they lived in adjoining houses, the kids running back and forth and Rhoda spanking them all impartially until to this day I have to pause and think which of my siblings are Roxie's and which Rhoda's. Ellen, the last wife, was fresh and open-faced, young enough to be the daughter of the first. My mother in particular had taken pains to make welcome the newcomer as the bride faced the difficult prospect of entering an established family.

Behind the six widows was the memory of dedication, of hardship, of cloak-and-dagger adventure on the underground, of privation and fear, and of the harrowing concern as to the effect a life of subterfuge and deceit might have upon their children. Ahead was the prospect of living on to become little old ladies in black, the object of whispers as they passed by, embarrassing anachronisms even among their own people. But each of them clung to the belief that it all was worthwhile. They had been of the chosen few, privileged to receive the special endowments no longer available. The Principle had never been for the masses, only for the select; they had been extremely fortunate for the opportunity to enter it. Each sat with her memories of romance and marriage, of being a wife to one of the great men of his generation. Certainly John W. Taylor must have been one of the great charmers, at least, for each wife held the cherished secret that she had been his favorite.

Many of the three dozen kids sat in rows behind the widows. On the stand were various Church brethren, there in an unofficial capacity inasmuch as John W. Taylor had been un-churched for taking wives after the Manifesto. Some were there as friends, others to see that the wrong things wouldn't be said. At the door my two oldest brothers, John (May's) and Joseph (Mother's), were on guard to make sure the reporter for the violently anti-Mormon *Salt Lake Tribune* would not get near the casket. It was none of the *Tribune's* business whether John W. Taylor was, or was not, buried in his temple robes.

A funeral is no place for controversy, and since Apostle John W. Taylor

had represented the greatest internal struggle in the history of the Church in his stand on the Principle, nothing was uttered at the service but platitudes. The customary eulogy to the memory of the departed could not be delivered, because the life of an excommunicant was not one to inspire others to follow. His fearlessness in fighting for what he believed was right in the face of all opposition was, of course, unmentionable on this occasion. His former Church position as an apostle could not be extolled, because he had lost it. The facts of his life were not an inspiration but an embarrassment. It was even impossible to give comfort to the mourners that things would be better on the other side, because the deceased had been cast into limbo. In short, nothing could be said about this world or the next that remotely referred to the man whose death was the reason for the ceremony. It was undoubtedly an extremely trying experience for the speakers.

The widows sat stiffly, enduring this final terrible hour of humiliation which climaxed their long dedication to a lost and discredited cause. The older children were grim and defiant, the smaller ones restless. At last, thankfully, came the closing prayer — more platitudes, more meaningless bromides. The good brother offering it was sincere enough, but laboring under the handicap of being required to utter words devoid of all spirit and meaning. Also, his dental plates were loose. Each phrase began and ended with a little whistle. To the family the whole service was a mere formality anyhow, and now the undulating whistle, punctuating a meaningless assortment of clichés, made it seem as if the entire ceremony were being burlesqued in gibberish.

A restlessness swept over the family. My mother bit her lip for self-control. The kids began to quiver, and then my brother Raymond was the first to break. Even knowing that it was the worst possible thing to do, he burst into wild laughter. Immediately, the pent-up passion of the proud family exploded. This was not a funeral service, but an elaborate farce. The mummery, the solemn façade of pretense, the observance of form devoid of all meaning, was too richly comic to endure in silence, particularly in view of the frank and iconoclastic character of John W. Taylor. The laughter ran through his smaller kids and then burst from the lips of the older ones. Even the six widows broke. They, of course, quickly controlled themselves, burying their faces in their handkerchiefs while shaken with the tearing and bitter mirth that was their only possible reaction to the travesty.

“Shh!”

The big kids shushed the little ones. My sister Juana still remembers a good, hard pinch from 1916.

I like to think that John W. Taylor, who fought all his life against sham and pretension, enjoyed the laughter at his funeral. It was the best farewell his family could give him at the time (his actual funeral sermon had to wait many years until the death of his youngest wife, Ellen, who was the first to follow). I am sure he was laughing with us.

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