
At the Bier of Debs.

by Morris Hillquit

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Every great movement for human progress and betterment produces a type of men and women endowed with special qualities for the fulfillment of its aims.

Among these there are usually a chosen few, sometimes one, who express the ideals and aspirations of the movement in such a high degree in their own persons that they become the visible incarnation of its spirit, the symbol of what is best and noblest in it.

Socialism, which has quickened the pulse of modern civilization for more than a generation and deeply permeated the moral and spiritual life of most nations and races of the world, is the sublimest movement in history.

To a human race affected with the primitive predatory instincts of the beast of prey, laboriously evolving through a succession of ever-changing but never-ceasing forms of mutual expression, of violence and wholesale carnage; to a human race nurtured in misery, fear, and bondage, Socialism holds out the dazzling vision of a new society — a society of truly civilized men and women living in mutual helpfulness and good will; a free, equal, and happy society of peace, abundance, and progress.

Modern Socialism's Leaders.

A movement based on such a lofty program and such an exalted ideal is bound to produce leaders of exceptional character. Modern Socialism has given to our age an imposing galaxy of thinkers and fighters, of heroes and martyrs; of men and women who have merged their whole being in the cause, who have lived for it and literally died for it.

Their names are deeply engraved in the hearts of all friends of human liberty and social justice. In a

more enlightened age they will adorn the pages of the world's history.

But even among these heroic figures of our movement, few reach the spiritual stature and moral grandeur of the immortal leader who has just passed from our midst — Eugene V. Debs.

What was it that set Debs apart from all the rest of us? What was it that made Debs one of those great outstanding figures that are born only once in a generation, perhaps once in a century, one of those sublime beings who come into our midst to bring sunshine into the dark world; who spend their lives among us largely misunderstood and misinterpreted, but leave us richer, better, and nobler for their having been with us? What was it that made Gene our Gene?

The Personality of Debs.

He had many high gifts of mind and heart. He was one of the most effective orators of America. His hold on the large masses of people, his power to move them, to raise them to his own lofty level, was unsurpassed. Self-taught as he was, he had few equals as a writer in the elegance and forcefulness of style.

But it was not his gifts alone that made Gene Debs. It was Gene himself. It was his personality, it was first of all the boundless love of everything that bears human countenance which radiated from him. Not an intellectual love, not an abstract love, but a love that flowed naturally, organically, communicating itself electrically to all who came within the magic sphere of his personal contact. He loved everybody — the poor and even the rich, the righteous, the criminal, and the outcast. He loved mankind and his very eloquence sprung from his love. He did not merely appeal and convince, he communicated part of him-

self, part of his very being to his audience. His hearers became one with him.

Coupled with that great love for mankind was his personal modesty, his simplicity of soul, the purity of his life and the saintliness of his spirit.

When Gene Debs gave himself to his cause, when he suffered for his convictions, when he went to jail, it was not done theatrically, it was an act of simple faith, done because he had to follow his convictions, because he could not do otherwise.

If Debs had cared to put his great gifts and magnetic personality in the service of wealth and power, he would have been what is commonly called a successful man, a man of wealth, of social position, of political power. Gene Debs did not care for these miserable achievements which to the common herd constitute success in life. He gave his gifts, his talents, he gave his all, he gave himself to the cause of the workers, to the downtrodden and the oppressed of every type.

When Gene proclaimed that "while there is a lower class, I am in it; while there is a criminal element, I am of it; while there is a soul in prison, I am not free," he expressed what he felt every moment of his life. In giving of his life, giving of himself to the cause of the weak and disinherited, Gene has attained greater satisfaction of mind, greater happiness of spirit than any of the so-called most successful men and women. Gene Debs, all through the fifty years of his services to mankind, was at peace with his conscience. He had the respect of his fellowmen, even his opponents, and what was infinitely more important to him, he maintained to the last his complete self-respect. Gene Debs has lived a happy life. And Gene Debs is dead.

Death comes to all things living sooner or later. Eugene Debs was almost seventy-one years old. His

frail body had undergone much physical suffering and privation. His death is a natural phenomenon, and yet it is difficult for those who knew him, for those who enjoyed his companionship, for those who loved him, to realize that he is no more among us, that he will never, never again return to us. There was not another man so much alive as Gene Debs. To the very end, in spite of his age, in spite of his feeble physique, his whole being radiated life and communicated life in others. And when I gazed at his still, cold form, at the eyes that have lost the deep lustre and living fire in them, the thin lips that will never be opened in eloquent appeal on behalf of his fellowmen, the rigid arms that will never bend in that brotherly embrace which he bestowed upon all, lofty or humble; when I saw that lifeless form, then, for the first time, I realized with poignant pain that Gene Debs physically is no longer among us. What is left to us is the memory of the precious hours of companionship with him, which have enriched all of us. What is left is the determination to make our own lives better and nobler by emulating his great example.

To those who were particularly near and dear to him, to his bereaved widow, with whom a bond of such close attachment united them; to his brother Theodore who, all his life, has been an organic part of Gene, morally, spiritually, almost physically; to his sisters and all other members of his family, we express our deep, heartfelt sympathy. We cannot offer them any consolation except this, that they have given to the world one of its greatest sons, and that their Gene has left behind him hundreds of thousands of the best men and women all over the world, who sincerely and reverently join with him in their deep grief.

And to Gene himself we sadly bid a last farewell.

Farewell! Farewell, our Comrade, our leader, our Gene. Farewell!

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