



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### **Usage guidelines**

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

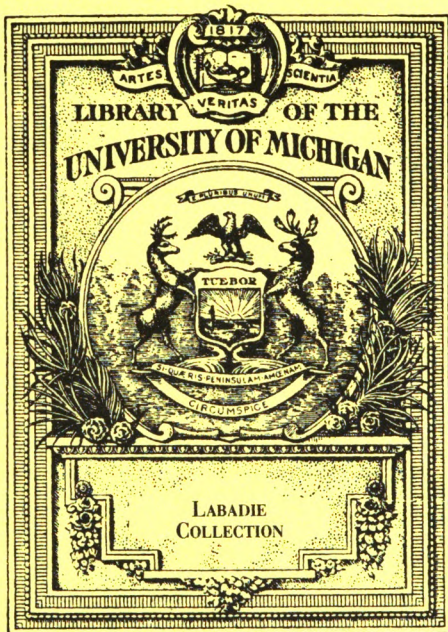
### **About Google Book Search**

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

Talks with Debs  
in Terre Haute

*(and Letters From Lindlahr)*

By DAVID KARSNER











*Talks with Debs In Terre Haute  
(and Letters from Lindlahr).*



**Books by David Karsner**

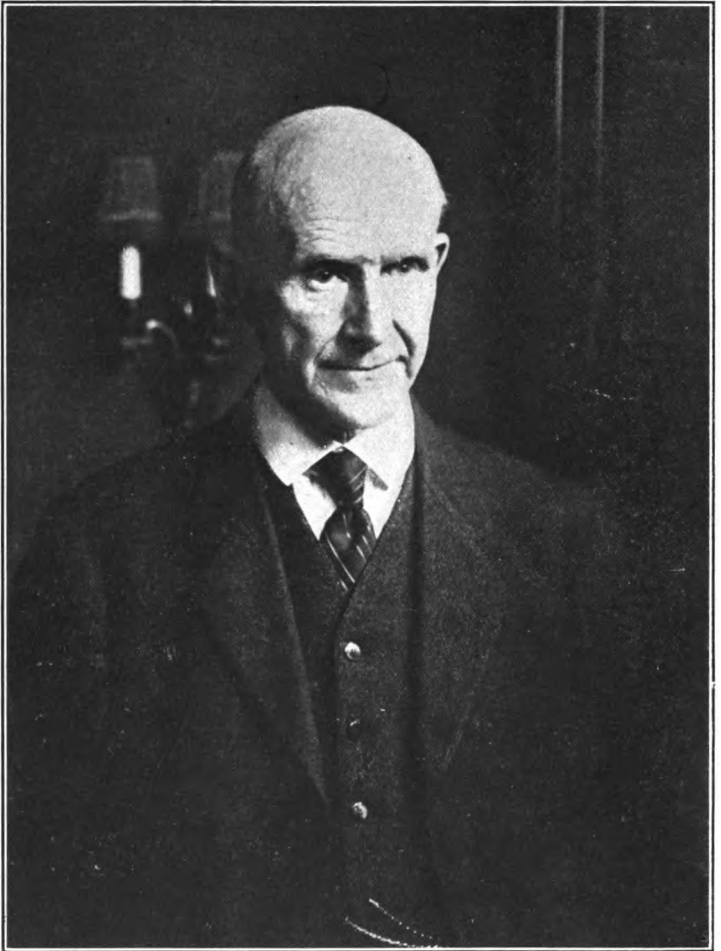
**HORACE TRAUBEL: HIS LIFE AND WORK (1919)**

**DEBS: HIS AUTHORIZED LIFE AND LETTERS (1919)**

**TALKS WITH DEBS IN TERRE HAUTE (1922)**

**UP TO THIRTY. A Novel. (In preparation for 1923.)**





EUGENE VICTOR DEBS

# Talks With Debs In Terre Haute

(and Letters from Lindlahr)

BY  
DAVID KARSNER

*Published by* THE NEW YORK CALL  
New York  
1922

SPEC  
LABS  
HX  
84  
133  
K.2

Spec/Lab  
gift of L. Maravaglia  
3/06

Copyright, 1922, by  
DAVID KARSNER

## INSCRIPTION.

To Horace Traubel,  
Somewhere in the Crowd.

Dear Horace: This is not a garland for your grave to fill my hand and dampen my eye. Flowers wither when winter winds press down the mound that veils the dead. There is fraternal warmth in what I am trying to say to you in a language not spoken in floral shops, nor heard in formal dedications as cold as the marble that marks them.



## PREFACE.

**EUGENE VICTOR DEBS** was released from the Federal penitentiary at Atlanta, Ga., December 25, 1921. He had served nearly three years of a 10-year sentence for violating the espionage law by making a speech at Canton, Ohio, on June 16, 1918, in which he expressed his disapproval of the world war in which the United States was at that time engaged on the side of the Allied Powers arrayed against the Imperial German and Austro-Hungarian governments.

A few days prior to his release he received a letter from the Bell Syndicate of New York, requesting him to write a series of articles, which would be given wide newspaper circulation, bearing upon and relating to his experiences as United States Prisoner No. 9,653.

Soon after he returned to his home at Terre Haute, Indiana, Debs gave his attention to various offers from newspapers and magazines whose editors requested articles from his pen, and among those considered was that from the Bell Syndicate. Early in March, 1922, a representative of the Syndicate visited Debs at Terre Haute and negotiated a contract for a series of prison articles to appear weekly. It was agreed that I should go to Terre Haute and help in the preparation of the articles with Debs, since his



health would not permit him to do the work unassisted.

On March 19 I arrived in Terre Haute and was met at the Big Four Railroad station by Eugene Debs and his devoted and loving brother, Theodore Debs. In a few minutes we were in the hotel near his home, where I was to stay, and Debs told me that it would be my task to take the prison story from his heart, as he put it.

Before leaving New York the thought occurred to me to keep a diary while with Debs, but I soon discovered that this scheme was scarcely possible because of the pressure of work upon me. Still, I was reluctant to neglect the opportunity to portray Debs to the public through his spoken word, so I yielded to my desire to jot down notes of our talks and to record incidents in our daily contact for thirty days—the time required to complete his dozen or more prison articles. It seemed to me his conversations and opinions revealed the universality of his mind and the scope and reach of his sympathies for everything pertaining to striving of the flesh and the spirit.

I did not deliberately probe Debs for his opinions about anything recorded in the pages that follow. I was interested in the vehemence that sometimes accompanied his talk and I tried not to intrude upon his chosen topics for conversations. They were at all times casual and spontaneous, and this will at once become apparent to the reader, who will find in these pages, I hope, the flash and current of thought expressed without his being aware that I would make a record of it.



I did not make notes in the presence of Debs. I deferred that item of interest in our association until I was alone at night in my room. Therefore, I do not claim stenographic accuracy for the quoted matter that follows. I have had to depend a great deal upon my memory, long trained in similar work, in reconstructing what may be called the framework of our conversations. However, I can vouchsafe to my reader my faithfulness to accuracy and fairness and, so far as this book is concerned, an impartial attitude toward the subjects herein recorded. The character of this book does not permit me to be insensible to the responsibility I assumed in writing it, for in a large sense a significant public personage speaks to the world in this book in unguarded manner, entirely unaware that his words would reach further than the ears of his single listener.

Then, if there are any who feel aggrieved over some comment made by Debs and recorded herein, may I not ask that I be permitted to share whatever criticism the injured one may deign to direct at him?

If Debs were a literary man and represented in the world by his own books, the world would at least have that authentic record by which to judge him, and a volume of this character might be accepted or rejected according to the feelings, opinions and prejudices of the reader without disturbing the import of the man's own written record by affirmation or negation. But Debs has written no single work by which he might be appraised as thinker, writer, social scientist or political economist. Yet he has produced voluminously on a thousand subjects, but his thoughts and opinions remain uncollected in the aged files of radical news-

papers and magazines, and hundreds of these are beyond reach of a collector for the pathetic reason that many of them have either ceased publication or kept no bound files. There are a few pamphlets and a score of leaflets written by Debs, but the significance of many of these is narrowed by political or party controversy. His prison articles will some day constitute his sole book to attract general public notice. This one volume, when it appears, will set aside a resolution he made in his early years not to ever write a book. Debs has lived and talked books. Many European agitators, revolutionists, and social scientists find time to write their views of life into books. Americans do not, as a rule.

For example, two literary items come to my mind bearing upon the matter of a public figure's opinions being recorded. We have "With Walt Whitman In Camden," by Horace Traubel, and "The Opinions of Anatole France," by Paul Gsell. As enlightening and as interesting as these books are, the public would still have Whitman's own "Leaves of Grass" by which to appraise him, and Anatole France's numerous titles by which to judge him. Literary men always have that advantage over public men who pitch their tents and hoist their flags on the transient fields of labor and politics. Men who come to fame through achievements, or spiritual and humanitarian tones not fully expressed in their own writings, are represented by their biographers or not at all.

I did not intend, nor have I achieved, a work as ambitious as that accomplished by my dear departed friend, Horace Traubel, in his monumental canvas depicting Walt Whitman's unconscious life and opinions.

I do not bring to these pages profound literary discussions and judgments on life that gleam from Mr. Gsell's talks with Anatole France. Both Traubel and Gsell wrote of literary men—the greatest in America and the greatest in France—whose opinions of people, and things, and life were already recorded by the men themselves and known to the world that reads and understands. I bring to these pages not a litterateur, nor a politician, nor a labor leader—but I do bring a humanist, a man with a heart and a soul, a lover of the human race.

The reader will find little that is biographical in these pages. I have tried only to present Debs in his wintry years, and if my book appears too fragmentary, I rejoin that life itself consists of fragments, of odds and ends; that our pleasures endure in moments only, while our sorrows may stretch through the wastes of time and usurp all the spaces of our imagination.

If it can be said that I had a purpose in doing this book after having written "Debs: His Authorized Life and Letters," that purpose is to present my subject again as an American deeply interested in and concerned about all manner of implied and applied subjects and manifestations invited through humanitarian impulses. His mind has a far greater range than the public is aware of. He has a grasp upon knowledge about men which time has mellowed to wisdom, and he has an uncommonly retentive memory that enables him to summon instances of forgotten history, poetry and anecdote to prove or amplify a point in his public speeches and private conversations.

Before bringing this foreword to a close I should like to stress the point for the reader that he must

realize that were Debs being consciously interviewed on any one of the subjects discussed herein his viewpoint would be extended and explained by him. Under the limitations of my purpose this was not possible. Most conversations are fragmentary. More is implied in talks between friends than is actually spoken. I cannot convey to you his gestures and glances that accompanied our talks. I may only give you his words, which you must read in the spirit that you would examine snapshots of your friends and those persons in whom you may have some interest.

I believe the spirit of Debs transcends every political inference that has held his attention during his forty years of active public life. His interests are spiritual and humanitarian, and his idealism led him into the Socialist movement. He is not a revolutionist in the material sense that Karl Marx was one, nor a spiritualist in the ethereal sense in which Saint Francis appeared. Every great man is curious about the curves in life through which he may saunter for still livelier affinities for his special talents. The world has known Debs as an orator pleading a political cause and as a labor agitator appealing for industrial democracy. I hope this book may be one of the means of introducing him as a man whose interests are as wide and as diversified as life itself. Not on my account have I moored him to any political orthodoxy or dogma.

He is not a labor leader, although he has led many strikes and was president of one of the first great industrial unions of railroad workers in this country. He is certainly not a politician, although he was a

candidate for President of the United States in five campaigns—1900, 1904, 1908, 1912, 1920. (In the latter presidential year Debs conducted his campaign from his prison cell in Atlanta.) Into both political and industrial fields Debs has brought a vital and cleansing idealism.

If there is to be an accounting beyond the grave what a glorious report Debs could give. I would desire nothing more earnest than the press assignment to report his speech before the Court of Eternity. I heard him make one before the Court of Man, and the result was a conviction.

November 1, 1922.  
New York City.

DAVID KARSNER.

## TALKS WITH DEBS IN TERRE HAUTE

### **A Citizen of the World.**

**I**T was as though the postoffices of the world had dumped their mail bags on the doorstep of Eugene Victor Debs.

In Terre Haute, Indiana, one of the simplest of men read the letters of people living in every known corner of the globe. They were saluting him from far and near as a lover of mankind, and comparing him with the saints.

It seemed that everybody in the United States wanted to see him and touch his hand and listen to his voice raised once more in behalf of humanity. The most extravagant promises were made by some of his correspondents for his physical welfare and comfort if he would only favor them with a personal call.

Heads of labor unions, Socialist organizations, lyceum bureaus, Chautauqua circuits, and even theatrical managers eager to reap fat profits from the sensation which they thought Debs' presence would create behind their footlights implored him to lend his ear to their offers of swollen purses for just one single date.

When Debs emerged from Atlanta Prison he was

the biggest public figure in the United States, and in my opinion he retains that stature.

If President Woodrow Wilson, who, while in the White House, told his secretary, Joseph P. Tumulty, that Debs would never be pardoned by his consent, could have witnessed the tremendous demonstrations spontaneously arranged in his honor from the gates of the prison to the White House steps, where he called upon President Warren G. Harding at the latter's special request, and again at Harrisburg, Pa., and Indianapolis and finally at Terre Haute, where 30,000 people turned out en masse to see Debs return to his home—I say, if President Wilson had seen those exhibitions of beautiful passion spent as a tribute to the man whom Mr. Wilson kept in prison, and then had he read even a few hundred of the thousands of testimonials that poured in upon Debs by letter, telegram and cable for several months following his release, perhaps the former President might understand to what extent the spirit of Debs has filtered through the world and ennobled those persons whom it has touched.

It is certain that President Harding has no doubt of it, for he received miles of petitions imploring him to release Debs, and finally he must have considered it the wiser course to free him whom everybody loved—that is, everybody who is capable of loving ideals and the symbols that represent them.

#### **Harding Somewhat Curious.**

It is small wonder that President Harding should have wished a personal meeting with Debs. When



the former Federal prisoner stepped into the executive office of Mr. Harding on the morning following Christmas Day, the President rose from his chair and walked toward the tall man who had greeted him with a simple, "Good morning, Mr. President."

"Well, I have heard so damned much about you, Mr. Debs, that I am now very glad to meet you personally," the President was reported as having said.

Immediately following the brief interview between Debs and Harding, the reporters gathered around the former and asked him how he liked the President and the White House.

"Mr. Harding appears to me to be a kind gentleman, one whom I believe possesses humane impulses. We understand each other perfectly. As for the White House—well, gentlemen, my personal preference is to live privately as an humble citizen in my cottage at Terre Haute."

"But you are not a citizen," put in one of the Washington reporters by way of reminding Debs that his commutation of sentence did not restore his citizenship.

"That is a matter of no import to me," replied Debs quickly. "The sovereignty of my citizenship resulted in my imprisonment. The government has made me a citizen of the world in fact. I am happy to be a Citizen of the World."

Debs was very sensitive about the international notoriety that attached to him following his release from Atlanta prison. He was very careful lest he be placed in the position of exploiting himself. On this point he remarked one morning:

"If there is nothing more than a curiosity in me because I am a 66-year-old ex-convict, who happened to be five times candidate for President of the United States, I shall do nothing at all to enhance that curiosity. I would not under any circumstances accept a single lecture engagement if I felt that I was to be exhibited like a sideshow. If there is nothing more to me than that, then I might just as well go into eclipse right now."

"Well," I put in, "you certainly understand that there is something in the psychology of the American people that has reacted upon the Bell Syndicate to persuade you to come out of your retirement and address them through the newspapers on the subject of your prison experiences. Don't you think that is a manifestation of the public's curiosity in you?"

He looked at me for a moment.

"Yes, I suppose it is. It is undoubtedly true that never before was such a rare opportunity offered me to write my message into the newspapers as there has been offered since I left Atlanta prison. Yet I believe the writing of the prison articles is taking a legitimate advantage of their offer. If the capitalist system can stand for what I have to say in its newspapers, I am willing to be exploited to that extent."

### **Would Tear the Mask From Prisons.**

Before we began writing the prison articles, Debs explained to me that he was in need of money. He made it clear that he had not had an income for the past five years; that his house needed repairs and that there were certain obligations of a personal nature that required his attention.

"But I am not writing these articles for the mere pecuniary returns that may result from them. My foremost object is to tear the mask from the penal system in this country. I want to show it in all its naked horror. Mr. Wheeler and I had a long talk about this matter. We went over the whole ground, and while I agreed that I would not write any Socialist propaganda into the articles, I would still reserve the right to show that in the majority of cases poverty was the cause of crime and that poverty had its roots in the social and economic system of capitalism. We shall have to be careful how we handle that delicate subject in these articles so as not to offend the newspaper readers. You and I will say nothing we do not mean, but we cannot say everything we do mean."

#### **Prefers Platform to Pen.**

Debs was careful and solicitous about my always feeling just fit to do the work required. After the first or second article was written, he remarked that it was up to me to take the story from his heart and write it.

"I am not a writer. I hate writing. A pen always resents getting into my hand. It seems to say, 'Now what do you think you are going to do?' Ink pots have never been inviting to me, but I cannot say the same of the platform. That is my forte. I recognize it to be so. Whenever I start writing I usually feel like James Whitcomb Riley said he felt when he finished a poem: 'It was like giving birth to a rough-shod colt!'

"When you don't feel like writing some days just say so and we will declare an illegal holiday. I

understand the writer's psychology. Sometimes he is full of steam. He feels like drying up all the ink-wells, whereas at other times his ideas may be buried in a torpid liver and his nervous energy at zero."

I told him that he was more likely to declare an illegal holiday than I, and he smiled and said, "Yes, maybe I shan't be able to keep this up every day."

Yet we actually took only two days off in the entire month's work because of his indisposition. That does not mean that he was able on all the other days to go ahead with the job. Indeed, there were many days during the month when he admitted feeling like a "rusty tin can on the dump." On such occasions I endeavored to dissuade him from working with me in the interviews, but he was anxious to complete the articles and to add a few to them for a book of his prison memoirs.

### **Dreiser and a Few Others.**

It was Sunday afternoon, and I was sitting with Debs and his wife in his workroom. I asked him if he had known Paul Dresser, who was a Terre Haute boy before he became Broadway's gay bon vivant and the creator of that sweetly sentimental ballad, so near the Hoosier's heart, "On the Banks of the Wabash Far Away."

"No," said Debs, "I never knew him. Of course I knew of him. Had heard about him here in Terre Haute in the early days, but he was a sport, and therefore he was out of my class."

Did he know Paul's brother, Theodore Dreiser, who was born in Terre Haute, a few short blocks from the Debs' home?

"No, I do not know him either, personally, but I think I have read one or two of his books and many criticisms of his work and articles about him. I have observed that Dreiser is constantly a subject of literary contention. He has bitter enemies and staunch friends."

What had he read by Dreiser?

"I think it was 'A Hoosier Holiday,' but I understand that his most popular and successful book is 'Sister Carrie.'"

Had he read that?

"No, I have not had much opportunity to read fiction. But that doesn't imply that I do not like it. I do like a good novel and enjoy it immensely."

I saw on his table Knut Hamsun's "Growth of the Soil." Had he read that?

"No, not yet. That was sent to me by a friend while I was in Atlanta prison. Are you familiar with it?"

I replied that I was, and praised it highly.

"Hamsun is one of those Scandinavian writers, isn't he?"

Yes, a Norwegian.

"There was another one of those novels by a Scandinavian writer that came to my hands while I was in Atlanta. It was called 'The Power of a Lie,' or 'The Lie,' or something like that. I can't remember who was its author, but I didn't like it. I could not get interested in either the characters or the theme."

"Then I must reveal the culprit as being Johann Bojer," I said.

"Yes, that's the man—Bojer."

We returned to the subject of Dreiser. I asked Mrs. Debs if she had read either "Sister Carrie" or "Jennie Gerhardt," adding that I thought they were his best novels. She had read "Sister Carrie" and before I left Terre Haute I presented her with a copy of "Jennie Gerhardt."

"Henry L. Mencken seems to be a staunch friend of Dreiser's," observed Debs. I agreed that was so.

Did he know Mencken?

"Not personally. I have read some things by Mencken. He is good for somnambulists. His style is incisive, quick, sure, and he has a good bit to say. But it is all so very negative, so hopeless, so pessimistic, that when you get through reading him you wonder what life is all about and whether there is any sense in anything. Mencken has said some kind things about me, but I am sure he does not in the least understand what the mission of Socialism is in the world. There is much in Mencken that is Nietzschean."

I interrupted here to remark that Mencken had not only written a most searching study of Nietzsche and his philosophy, but that he was regarded as one of the foremost apostles of Nietzsche in the United States.

"Well, if you hadn't told me that I would have suspected it, for there are jets and flashes of Nietzsche in nearly everything Mencken writes. The Nietzscheans have very little for us. Their philosophy and ours are at loggerheads. Yet, there are parts of Nietzsche that are pure gold."

In this connection he mentioned "Thus Spake Zarathustra," which he had read.

**Traubel, Frank Harris and Wilde.**

"Gene, who is your favorite American poet?" He smiled.

"Your friend and mine, Davey. Horace Traubel."

Did he think Traubel a greater poet than Walt Whitman? Debs blew a curl of smoke out into the room from his pipe, tilted his head back in his chair and after a pause said, "Whitman isn't an American poet, but the poet of international democracy and feeling. The poems of Whitman can be applied to Spain, France, Germany, everywhere, as indeed they are read and understood in all those lands. I think that Traubel was the poet of militant democracy, as we understand it in our day. He is too little known. He was too little understood even by those for whom he wrote. Horace's genius had in it the seed of his own martyrdom, but I am sure there will come a day when his poems and prose will be sought for and read in this country as the writings of few other men have been read before."

Who was Debs' favorite prose author?

"Well, I have many favorites. I have always had a passion for Victor Hugo and Eugene Sue. If you mean of the moderns and apply it to our own land, I think Frank Harris is one of the best writers of pure English in America. His 'Contemporary Portraits' are nothing less than the product of genius, and I am told that he has a book on Shakespeare that is incomparably the best of its kind in Shakespeareana."

**Calls Biography Brutally Frank.**

Had he read Harris' "Life of Oscar Wilde"?

"No, I never read it, but some reviews and comments that I saw scared me away from it. In the first place, I have very little interest in Oscar Wilde, and in the second place, I have no interest in a biography so brutally frank and so cruel as the one which I understand Harris wrote about his friend."

This last remark led us into a rather vehement discussion of the privileges and prerogatives of a biographer. I could not help feeling that I was somewhat on the defensive, due entirely to my own sensitiveness, by reason of the fact that I had written a biography of the man now sitting before me. I reminded Debs that Harris in reviewing my book had said that I should have put in the shadows as well as the lights of my subject's life. Debs said he remembered reading the criticism.

"But," he added, "there should be a line drawn somewhere between that part of a man's life that is peculiarly personal to him and his, and that part which belongs to the public." He smiled, shook his head and said, "I would not want Frank Harris to be my biographer," which evoked laughter from Mrs. Debs and myself.

"Do you think you are entirely safe in my hands, Gene?" I said slyly.

"Well, I stand by what I have just said."

Debs remarked that if it was true that Harris had written such a painfully frank biography of Oscar Wilde, "revealing all the disgusting episodes in his life," as Debs put it, the work was probably too



repulsive for him to spend any time over it. I objected that Harris had not been unfriendly to Wilde's memory and supported Harris in all the sincerity that he had spent in his work on Wilde.

"If Oscar Wilde was such a bad man and if the world believed he was at the same time an interesting one and a great artist, then I see no reason why Frank Harris, as the friend of Oscar Wilde, should not tell all he knew about him, provided he put the record down without malice."

### **Didn't Care For Wilde's Work.**

Debs still shook his head, saying that he thought some consideration should be shown to others interested who might not wish to have a record so painful given to the world.

What did he think of Oscar Wilde's work?

"I am afraid I do not care much for it."

"But surely you like 'The Ballad of Reading Gaol'?"

"No, not even that. The poem to me has the ring of clods on a coffin."

I contended that the "Ballad" was reputed the world over to be among the few classics of prison poetry.

"It is a very fine poem, but it is not prison poetry. Wilde is crying about his own misery in that poem, thoughtless and careless about the misery of others."

"How about 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism'?"

"No, I won't admit even that. Wilde knew nothing about Socialism. He was an aristocrat, a gourmand. I am certain that Wilde could sit in a house, gorge himself on sumptuous food with the knowledge

that the people living next door were in misery and starving and be undisturbed by the knowledge. Oscar Wilde, I am sure, was not a man that I should like, and I am equally sure that I am not the kind of man he would like."

### **Underground Radicalism.**

Debs spoke of having received a visit from a Communist who stopped in Terre Haute from San Francisco on his way to New York, and the object of his visit with Debs was to inform him of the purpose and plan of the Communist party in the United States. I happened to step into Debs' uptown office on Wabash avenue for a moment or two on the afternoon when the visitor was closeted with Debs. I remember seeing the young Communist tilted back against the wall and Debs sitting in a straight arm-chair listening intently to the earnest words of the revolutionist. The next morning Debs remarked to me about the man's visit:

"There are some of those fellows who seem to thrive on the romance of underground movements. They seem to think there is something new in all that. They point to Russia before the revolution. The conditions in Russia of that period were vastly different from those that obtain in the United States now. It seems to me that any underground radical movement in the United States is not only foolish, but suicidal. Why, good Heavens! if the Socialist party has failed to convince the working class of America in twenty-two years of overground propaganda, what can the Communists expect to accomplish by underground methods?"

"All my life I have been opposed to secret and whispering organizations. There is nothing in them that is beneficial to the workers, and it has been proven time and again that nearly every underground revolutionary movement is honeycombed with spies and agents provocateurs."

He mentioned the invitation he had extended to William Z. Foster, leader of the steel strike in 1919, and to Mrs. Margaret Prevy, of Akron, Ohio, to come to Terre Haute and discuss with him matters relating to working-class activities and propaganda. Foster at this time was editing an insurgent labor magazine in Chicago. Mrs. Prevy is a personal friend who has been interested in active radicalism for many years. Debs said:

"I do not see any difference between the Workers' party and the Socialist party. I have read the platform of the former and it is almost identical with that of the Socialists."

I put in, that while they both avowed similar principles and sought identical ends—the abolition of capitalism—there did seem to be some slight difference in the spirit of the two organizations.

"Well, you see, the Workers' party is younger and therefore noisier, and perhaps that accounts for the spirit that you speak of. It seems to me that the whole thing resolves itself into a matter of leadership. I do not see any reason why the Workers' party and the Socialists may not accommodate their differences, which are chiefly over tactics, and work hand in hand for the constructive work that needs to be done. If there are any leaders of the

two parties standing in the way of an amalgamation, the membership of both of the parties should sweep these leaders aside."

### **The Communists and Espionage.**

He spoke of the American Communists again.

"I have heard it inferred that some of their propaganda might have been written by agents of the Department of Justice. It seems strange that some of their most revolutionary leaders have been able to go from this country to Europe without their passports even being so much as questioned. Honest radicals have been fooled and misled before. Secrecy invites agents provocateurs.

"There is one phase of the Communists' attitude in this country that I do not understand. During the years that I was in Atlanta Penitentiary I know that a number of their members considered me one of the 'Casualties of the War.' They did little or nothing for the release of political prisoners. Yet when their own members are caught in the net they usually resort to every legal loophole to extricate themselves."

I called Debs' attention to the fact that this was so in a number of cases, but that there had been some exceptions. He said, "Name them." I mentioned James Larkin.

"Yes, yes," he assented. "Jim came through and he will serve his sentence, but he is an exception that only proves the rule. I want you to understand that I am not filing any complaint against the Communists because they did not join in the petition for

the release of myself and other political prisoners. So far as I am personally concerned, that made no difference to me and they knew it as well as I. I mention it only by way of attempting to shed a light on their own tactics and ethics."

### **Terre Haute a Mecca for Travelers.**

At another time Debs spoke of the innumerable requests that continued to be made from people in all walks of life for interviews. It would seem that Terre Haute had become a Mecca for travelers East and West, North and South. They gave him no rest. They were thoughtful enough, but their thoughtfulness in seeking him out and demanding his time wore him down. In this connection he recalled the incident of a woman who camped on his front doorsteps all night soon after his release. He said that this woman knocked at the door repeatedly and when Mrs. Debs firmly told her that her husband was too tired and too weary to see anyone, she retorted that she would remain until she could see him.

"At last, when my wife told me that she was still sitting on the porch, I was so hopping mad that I told her under my breath to go to hell. Of course I didn't tell her that, but that is how I felt. The inherent lack of consideration of some people is astonishing. They do not realize that I have been shut away in a cage from my home for nearly three years and that two years before I went to the penitentiary I was on the road lecturing almost continuously and hounded and harassed by detectives and Department of Justice agents until I nearly dropped

in my tracks from sheer physical and mental exhaustion. There has been not one hour's complete rest and relaxation for me since I came home from Atlanta. I could stand going to the penitentiary again, yes! But I couldn't endure another release."

### **Distressed by Socialist Split.**

He mentioned a letter he had received from Otto Branstetter, national secretary of the Socialist party:

"Branstetter has written me another long letter of about five pages, telling me what I should do with reference to the Socialist party row with the Communists. I have been harassed on this subject since the day I landed, and I am just about sick of it. When I went to the penitentiary I left the Socialist party united. While I was away all factions fought among themselves like the Kilkenny cats, and now that the various factions have almost succeeded in annihilating each other, they think I should get them out of their trouble. Well, they are mistaken. I can't do it. In the first place, I haven't the physical strength. I am fighting for my life now, and they do not seem to understand that. They say, 'Oh, Debs has been home three months. Let's force him out of his retirement.' Had they let me alone for three months perhaps I would now have the strength to take up active work for Socialism."

I asked him what Branstetter wanted.

"He asks that I make a statement indorsing the attitude and position of the Socialist party with reference to the factional split. I receive the same demands from the Communists and the Workers'

party! They all demand that I indorse their side. Each is sure they are right. They have no doubt about that. The other is wrong—there is no doubt about that, either. I know perfectly well that even were I to make a definite statement of my opinion and belief with reference to this party wrangle, I should not have the physical strength to defend my position, and they would come here in regiments to stamp over my prostrate body and demand, and demand, and demand.”

### **Debs Finally Made Decision.**

(Despite the reluctance of Debs to take a definite position as between his continued allegiance to the Socialist party or affiliation with any one of the other revolutionary organizations—a reluctance which probably had its roots in the fear that his adherence to either side would alienate the members of the other and possibly widen the breach between the Socialist party and other organizations, Debs came finally to a full realization of the fact that he would have to take one side or the other. Fully six months after he expressed his aversion to taking a side in the political controversy he issued a personal and formal statement from the sanitarium through the national office of the Socialist party in which he set at rest all conjecture as to his position. The statement was printed in full in the magazine section of *The New York Call* for October 8, 1922, and I quote from it what seems to me the most salient paragraph:

“After taking time personally to see and hear Comrades representing the various sides to the fac-

tional controversy, giving them equally fair and impartial hearing; after reading carefully the literature of the several factions and weighing carefully their arguments for themselves and against each other, and after studying the complicated situation as best I have been able to do under the circumstances, I have arrived at the definite conclusion that my place in the future as in the past is in the Socialist party, and in its ranks and beneath its banner I shall continue to serve the working class and the social revolution as soon as my shattered strength is restored and I am able to resume my former activities.”)

### **Debs Exhausted by Strain.**

On this particular day Debs looked very tired. His color was ashen gray. He seemed very weak, and I observed as he entered the sitting room of his home, in which we held all of our talks about the prison articles, that his step was uncertain.

“Have you ever been so thoroughly exhausted as you seem to be now, Gene?”

“Only once before,” he replied. “That was immediately after the presidential campaign of 1912. Of the four presidential campaigns that I made, that was by far the most strenuous. Some thought that I was not physically able to make a campaign, and to prove it they planned a speaking tour for me the like of which no presidential candidate has ever made in the history of the United States. I spoke for 68 consecutive days, sometimes five and six times a day, without rest. There were times when I thought I would drop in my tracks, but I kept on, determined to fulfill the expectations of the Comrades throughout the country.”



### **The Psychology of a Chair.**

Early in our daily meetings I would go to his home at 1:30 in the afternoon and we would talk until 4 or 5, when I would go to my room at the St. Nicholas Hotel around the corner and write on the articles, many sections of which he dictated. As this schedule necessitated my writing at night, I asked Debs to shift our daily sessions to the morning, so that I could write his articles in the afternoon. This was agreeable to him and thereafter we met every day at 9 o'clock, our interviews consuming approximately three hours.

At this time carpenters and masons were at work on his house, giving it repairs that had been neglected five years. He said the side door would always be unlocked and that I should use it in going and coming.

I would go in, hang my hat and coat on a hook near the door, and go up the back stairs, down a short hall to his library, where I most always found him sitting in a large leather rocking chair, which had been given to him many years ago by the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen. This chair had wide arms, and as I write I can visualize Debs now sitting in it, his long, lean hands tenderly caressing its arms. I remarked to him about how comfortably he seemed to fit into its embraces.

"Do I?" he said. "Well, this is a very comfortable chair. You see, there is something more in a chair than the material of which it is made. There are some chairs that have a psychology. They welcome you. They invite you to sit down. I always feel that way about this one."

### Impossible to Rest at Home.

As I approached his den each morning I would knock gently on the door, if it was closed, or on the doorjamb, if it was open. If he were sitting he would rise to greet me with, "Good morning, David, how do you feel this morning? I do not see why I should ask you that, for you look as fresh and as saucy as a morning lark."

Then I would ask him if he had had a good night, and invariably received a negative reply.

"No, not very good. Sometimes when I go to bed every nerve in me aches for rest, for relaxation, but I can't sleep. You are too young to know what that is. I hope you never know the torture of being thoroughly exhausted in every nerve and not being able to close your eyes. The nights are interminable."

He often said that as he lay in bed wide awake he would live over again the years he had spent in the penitentiary, and the forms and faces of the convicts would march by his bedside in an endless pageant of tearless misery.

"It seems almost impossible for me to get the rest in Terre Haute that I need. It isn't as bad as it was when I first came home, when the telephone rang every minute of the day and night and the mail was left at my front door in sacks, special delivery letters and telegrams from all sorts and conditions of people, demanding lectures, articles, statements for this, that and the other thing, and I even had four invitations to appear in vaudeville! There was one offer from a promoter in Toledo, who had just opened a large amphitheater, and he was anxious to fill it the first night. I suppose he sought the biggest curiosity that he

could think of, so he sent me a long telegram, saying that he would pay me \$2,000 and all expenses if I would just walk upon the stage and off again. I have been considered on the same par with the fat lady in the circus, whereas you see, I look like a string bean, and not a very delectable one at that."

### **A Back-Stair Speech.**

There were three men at work demolishing the barn in back of Debs' home. One morning, when I went to him, he was sitting in the dining room, reading the paper while waiting for me to come. As I entered and sat down he said that he had made his first real speech since his return to Terre Haute. He called it "a dress rehearsal." I was astonished and asked to whom.

"Why, to those three men out there at work. I am sure I talked to them in a way that they had never been talked to before. I gave them a real Socialist lecture and told them not to work too hard, to take it easy. The young fellow enjoyed it immensely and I am sure he will interpret literally what I said to him."

"With the result," I put in, "that he will be 'sped up' when his boss comes around."

"Yes, I suppose so," Debs added. "You see, I can't bear to think of those fellows out there doing work like that for me. There is something in my proletarian nature that resents it. They are doing what I wouldn't do myself, and therefore I have no right to expect them to break their backs when I am sure I wouldn't do it."

"You mean they are doing work that you could

not do, rather than what you would not do. Is the work that the young fellow is doing any harder than stoking a locomotive, which you did as a boy?"

"No, that is right. But then, it is different now. I have taken it easy for many years. I have been the favored one."

"I don't see just how you make that out, Gene. The work that you have done for forty years has resulted in the physical condition in which you find yourself at the present moment, when you admit that you are scarcely able to walk a dozen blocks to your office without being exhausted. It doesn't seem to me that a man who has been in five jails as a result of his work has been favored, or has had such an easy time of it."

"Well, that is all in the point of view," he smiled.

"But about that speech, how long did you speak to them?"

"Oh, fifteen minutes or so."

"Well, you know if it leaks out of Terre Haute that you are making back-stair speeches, or barn-storming, as it were, to the workmen on your place, you will be besieged with more demands for speeches than you now receive."

"Well, then, I shall have to rely upon you not to give this little incident any publicity. And now shall we start work?"

"Yes, I am ready when you are."

### **The Matter of a Blue Print.**

Upon another occasion, Mrs. Debs entered the library while Gene and I were discussing a phase of the prison articles. He did not resent her intrusions.

Without seeming to break our conversation with any abruptness, he would look up into her face and inquire affectionately, "Is there anything you want, Duckie?" On this occasion, she had in her hand a blue print, showing the plans for the alteration and repairs of their home. She bent over him, running her finger down the blue print, drawing his attention to this and that item.

"Do you think that will be all right that way, dearie?" she inquired.

"Yes, I think that is just the thing. That is perfectly all right. Whatever suits you about that suits me. You are the engineer, you know."

Mrs. Debs took the blue print from her husband's hands and stood a moment looking at him, an expression on her face that seemed to say, "What suits you suits me."

### Working With Debs.

In the course of our work together I always found Debs took kindly the suggestions that I might make about either adding or omitting certain phases of his experience. His tendency was to generalize the narrative rather than stress many touching and dramatic points in it. I found myself constantly directing his attention to the fact that newspaper editors and the public were not so much interested in the prison problem as they were in his life in prison.

"After all," I said to him upon one occasion, "you must perceive that this story is your personal experience. I am aware that you are very sensitive about exploiting yourself, but your signature will influence people to read these articles. And if they are not

records of your own experience, the reader will not peruse them further than the first or second installment." Reluctantly he agreed that that was so.

In planning the series I worked with him almost one entire day, in which we mapped out the articles, or rather writing a synopsis of them, and it was my desire that his most personal experiences should form the first part of the series.

I remember once remarking to him that only two words in the articles might prevent them from being one of the most human narratives ever written about a former prisoner. He at once inquired what those two words were. I replied, "Eugene Debs."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that you lack the ego necessary to tell your own story in your own way with all the lights and shadows, with nothing left out, that some men seem able to do."

He looked at me for a moment and I continued:

"How wonderful it would have been if Jesus could have written His own memoirs, but instead for 2,000 years civilization has had to rely upon several versions of Him and His work written by persons, some of whom seem not to have had the slightest gift of revealing the intrinsic human quality of Christ."

"I see exactly what you mean. It is a good point."

"Your admiration of Frank Harris' 'Contemporary Portraits,'" I went on, "is predicated largely upon Frank Harris' ability to inject his own ego, his own personality, his own feeling of what he saw, what he felt, what he said to the person about whom he wrote, without seeming to be offensive. Harris does that

well because he is an artist, and if he were not an artist it would be offensive."

"That is one of the best analyses of Frank Harris I have ever heard. It explains a good bit of him," said Debs.

### **Amenable to Suggestions.**

There were times when he would be talking at some length, I sitting in a rocker near him, taking notes now and then, and sometimes suddenly looking at him in a questioning way.

"Now, what's the matter?" he would say.

"Well, I do not think I would say it that way if I were you. Why not say it this way?" And then I would reword his thought.

"Yes, perhaps that would be the better way. We do not want to offend our people before we get into their house. But when we get into their house, then we can suggest alterations in the architecture." He had sly ways of indulging the whimsical side of his nature.

Upon a similar occasion he looked at me sharply, saying:

"When I see your pen sputtering like that I know you are going to call me to order. That reminds me of years ago, when Mrs. Debs used to take my letters in longhand. I would be prancing up and down the floor, like this, my tongue's tip laden with gems of genius, when all at once I would look at Kate and she wouldn't be writing a word. I would say, 'Now, what's the matter?' and she would reply: 'That is perfect nonsense. That is stupid!'"

### **Friends Among the Rich.**

I had been reading columns of eulogistic obituary about a certain Mr. Ijams in the Terre Haute papers and remarked to Debs one morning if he had known the deceased, who was one of the community's richest men, owning large tracts of land in the city, a manufacturer of some prominence and in former years a breeder of fancy horses for the old racetrack in Terre Haute.

Judging from the newspaper accounts, Mr. Ijams was a leading citizen and one upon whose word the community's business affairs depended to a large extent.

"Yes, indeed, I knew him very well. He was a warm personal friend of mine."

Surprise must have appeared in my face for I could not imagine two men having less in common than Mr. Ijams, judging from what I had read of him, and Debs, with whose life I was familiar.

What could there be in this capitalist now dead that attracted Debs and caused him to consider the departed as a warm personal friend?

"You know, Dave," said Debs, looking squarely at me, "so many Socialists and labor people make the serious mistake of believing that all people who are not with us are against us. There is a reason for that psychology. The intensity of the labor struggle, the fierceness of the economic combat, the bitter struggle to live makes working people view the capitalists as their active and eternal enemies. I have known few men who had a warmer and a more tender consideration for his fellow-men than Mr.



Ijams. He was a plutocrat through and through, but he had a heart. We shouldn't forget that many capitalists are born capitalists just as many workers are born workers, and the former are creatures of their environment and circumstance in precisely the same sense as the latter."

"That sounds like commiserating the capitalists," I objected.

"No, I do not mean it that way."

"Well, what do you mean?"

"I mean that a capitalist may be as humane as a worker if he chooses. He can be decent, kind and considerate, and the fact that he is a capitalist does not necessarily imply that his heart and soul are wedded to the system that makes him a capitalist. I have had many rich men tell me that they would thank their stars if some better social and economic arrangement could be made that would relieve them of the stress and sorrow their wealth had brought upon them.

"Of course Mr. Ijams and I were always on opposite sides of the social question, but I knew that I had his warm regard and he knew he had mine. I could have borrowed any sum of money from Mr. Ijams at any time I wanted it without even giving him a note, but I never borrowed a dollar that way in my life and I am never so distressed as when I owe money."

#### **Pays Tribute to W. F. Gable.**

Upon a similar occasion Debs referred to another capitalist, William F. Gable—of Altoona, Pa.—now dead. It happened that I knew in a personal way

of the intimacy that extended over many years between Debs and Gable, who owned a large department store and who was reputed to be worth considerable money.

"Gable never let his right hand know what his left hand did, because that hand was nearest his heart. Gable always gave money in cash. He never kept any records or any account of his contributions to the causes in which he believed."

This led Debs to speak of his last meeting with Gable in Altoona, in 1916. It was also his last meeting with Horace Traubel. Traubel was visiting Gable, and at the same time was writing daily articles for the Altoona Times on subjects relating to the great world war. Debs had gone to Altoona to deliver a lecture, after which he was Gable's guest.

"I remember so well standing in the Pennsylvania Railroad depot with Gable on one side and Horace on the other. Each had his arm entwined in mine and I felt their hearts beat. That was the last I ever saw of Gable and Horace. Two wonderful men! Two beautiful souls who lived a thousand years before their time."

### **Dykaar, the Sculptor.**

Debs spoke of a Washington sculptor, M. W. Dykaar, who had left Terre Haute only a few days before my arrival. Dykaar came to make a bust of Debs. He completed his work in four weeks. Debs referred to him as "a perfect artist."

"I never saw a man concentrate so intensely upon his work. He would work for hours modeling my

ear, or getting one of the furrows in my brow at just the right angle. He seemed to be utterly oblivious of everything and everybody except the clay before him. Withal, he was sensitive about the strain he might be causing me and in moments when he would relax his attention he would ask me if I was tired, but he said it in such a way that I felt he did not care a continental whether I was or not."

Debs smiled as he said the last and I understood that he meant to impress upon me the artistic sense of the sculptor, who had done a piece of work which both Debs and his wife appraised as an excellent likeness. Throughout my stay with Debs I heard echoes both from him and his wife of Dykaar's visit. They often referred to the "mess" that Dykaar made in their rooms and in the cellar where he did his casting. I learned that Dykaar had done a bust of former Vice President Thomas Marshall for the Senate gallery, and the late Speaker Champ Clark for the House gallery. The Debs bust was to be eventually done in marble.

#### **A Little Nugget of Domesticity.**

One morning, as we sat in the library, Debs had a box of old letters on his table. Mrs. Debs entered, walked over to the window, drew a chair up to the table and began looking through the collection. Debs kept on talking to me and every once in a while when a paper rattled he very cautiously turned his head, then he would turn around to me again, continue talking until another paper rattled, when he would again stretch his neck in her direction. I was secretly amused by this and wondered what would come of it.

Finally Debs said: "Is there anything you are looking for, Duckie?" Without turning around she said: "No, nothing at all, Dearie," and kept on rooting. At this moment the telephone rang and Gene, who is slightly deaf in one ear, and therefore avoids talking over telephones whenever possible, directed his wife's attention to the summons.

"I don't hear the telephone ringing."

"Yes, I am sure it is," said Debs, getting up and opening the door. I heard the ringing, but Mrs. Debs, whose interest by this time was evidently absorbed in an old letter that had come under her eye, insisted that the telephone was silent. Debs looked at me slyly and smiled and went downstairs to answer it.

### Friendly Imposition.

Debs spoke of Irwin St. John Tucker, editor of "The Debs Magazine," a monthly publication started in Chicago while he was in Atlanta prison and of which he is the chief contributing editor. Debs said that Tucker had come down to Terre Haute some time during March, merely talked with Gene and Theodore Debs, and then went back to Chicago and wrote of his visit, making it appear that Gene and Theodore had written the material contained in the article, which bore their names.

I do not know of any public man in the United States who has been more imposed upon by his friends than Debs. Innumerable articles and statements have been signed by him that he never saw or authorized, and for this reason, if for none other, it would be difficult for any one to collect authentic writing by Debs.

"I like Tucker very much. He is an able writer. When I thought that you might find it inconvenient to

come out here and help me to do this work I had Tucker in mind as a substitute. He is a brilliant writer. But he should not have taken advantage of a talk by signing my name to it as an article. Do you think he should have done that? Do you think that he had that right?"

Of course I agreed that Tucker had stepped beyond the bounds of newspaper ethics, but I added that the thing was done in good spirit, which Debs conceded.

"Well," said Debs, finally, "I understand how zealous these fellows are to get original stuff for their magazines and I guess we can forgive them, especially when we bear in mind that you are at present an editor and I used to be one." (Debs was editor of the Firemen's Magazine, for several years the official publication of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen.)

Before I left him on the day when the above conversation took place, Debs asked me if I would write a 300-word article, over his signature, for "The Debs Magazine."

"There are three points that I want you to bring out for me. First, the demand for amnesty for political prisoners; second, the urgent need of support for the Russian famine sufferers, and third, the necessity for unity of the factions in the Socialist movement. You will know what to say about all that."

That night I wrote the statement and took it to him the following morning. He read it and remarked: "That is the kind of article that I would have written at my best. It says exactly what I wanted to say, and in the way that I would have said it."

### Delegates His Odd Writing Jobs.

It was not a new experience for me to write Debs' statements under his signature. At his request I wrote several statements while he was in Atlanta prison, the rules of which limited his writing privileges. It frequently happened that he would ask me to write a statement for a Socialist or radical paper or some convention or special propaganda meeting while I was visiting him in the penitentiary. I made a dozen or more trips to Atlanta and remained weeks at a time when it was thought he would be released. In Terre Haute, after he was released, he received all manner of requests for statements, many of which he wrote with his own hand, but when it was possible for him to delegate the job to his brother, Theodore, and, as it happened at the time, to me, he relieved himself to that extent.

In this connection I recall that the national office of the Socialist party requested Debs to write a special statement to be read at their convention, which assembled in Cleveland, Ohio, on April 27, 1922. Debs put off the writing of this statement from day to day, and he frequently referred to it as a task to which he must give his attention. Finally I volunteered to write the statement for him and he replied:

"No, I think I shall have to write this statement myself. It is one of those ticklish matters and I must write it in a way not to commit myself on the party controversy until I have heard all sides."

I understood by that that Debs meant that he would write such a statement that could not be interpreted as a blanket indorsement of Socialist party methods

and tactics as against those of the Workers' party (Centrist) and the Communist party (Left).

That is what I meant when I said in the foregoing that it will be very difficult for a future historian to positively identify material written over Debs' signature as the product of his own pen. Those who have read Debs' writings cannot but be impressed with the feeling that they were written by an orator, for his written word is very much in the same vein and style as his spoken statements. In his writing he is given to long, swinging sentences, in which alliteration and adjective frequently appear. Such is not usually the vehicle of the trained and professional writer, and I hope I may be pardoned the observation that Debs would be more effective as a writer if he dropped at least half of his rhetorical passages when he takes his pen in hand.

Perhaps I should digress a moment to explain just what I mean.

Some portion of all of his prison articles he dictated sentences with such vehemence and passion that it was as though he were standing on a platform facing an audience of 10,000. He would speak rapidly, his voice rising to emphasize a point, and falling to bring his statement to a perfect period. I often thought how unfortunate it was that that mellifluous voice of his was confined for the moment by the four walls that held us in daily audience. The written word does not always hold the oratorical beauty of the spoken one. Concise and brittle writing may, on occasion, be more effectual.

### **His Influence Upon Others.**

Often when I would leave him at the end of our talk he would ask me if there was anything I needed, if my room at the hotel was comfortable, if I had all the tobacco I wanted to smoke, if I had fruit in my room and, on rainy days, if I had an umbrella. Many times he would stop at the hotel and come up to my room, his pockets bulging with apples and oranges, maybe a bar of chocolate, hidden in an inner pocket, along with a handful of cigars. I recall that one day when he left me at the door of my room he met on the landing the middle-aged housekeeper of the hotel. He doffed his hat to her and smiled genially, as though she were the mistress of an executive mansion, and a few minutes later he returned with a box of candy for the woman, who was born and raised in Terre Haute and who told me later that, although she had often heard her mother speak of "Mr. Debs," she had never met him until that moment of happy felicitation.

I was aware that the many little favors which I received from this kind woman in the following weeks of my stay had something to do with the very tender and very sweet impression made upon her by the man with whom I was working. This was true not only of the housekeeper, but of all the attaches of the hotel and its guests.

Morris Walsh, the proprietor of the St. Nicholas, had long been a personal friend of Debs, and over his desk hung an early photograph of Gene in a large gilt frame. Walsh told me he would not part with it for any sum of money.

It is interesting to observe that during the years



of Debs' incarceration Mr. Walsh frequently went to Mrs. Debs to inquire if he could be of any service to her, and on many occasions he did such things as fix the back gate when the wind blew it off, repaired the fence and manifested in other ways his affection and devotion to his friend and neighbor. Although I say it in a spirit of generosity and kindness, hoping that no sharp criticism may be leveled at me for the observation, I think it would add something to the point of interest in this note about Mr. Walsh to say that at one time he was a prominent Democratic politician in Terre Haute and was sentenced to Leavenworth penitentiary along with the Mayor of the city and a number of others for alleged complicity in debauching one of the municipal elections. Debs remarked about this incident on several occasions, and said that Mr. Walsh was entirely innocent of the charges against him, but that rather than expose others who might come to grief he permitted himself to be hauled off to Leavenworth as a sacrifice.

"Walsh is pure gold through and through," said Debs to me. "A man could not have a better friend than him."

In my subsequent meetings with Mr. Walsh I found this was not an exaggeration.

### **Admires Romain Rolland.**

One evening Debs came to my room, knocked at my door, which I always kept locked, and inquired if I felt like accompanying him to the movies. After I assented, he asked me why I kept the door locked.

"Surely, you are not afraid of any intrusion here.

The pioneer days in Terre Haute are gone. I remember when it wasn't safe for a man to live in a hotel in Terre Haute unless he bolted his door with a crowbar, but that was long before you were born."

"No, I am not afraid of anybody breaking in, and I never lock my door when I am only idling in my room, but somehow, when I write, I feel that if a door is unlocked some one may come in unaware and disturb me. Maybe I don't lock others out as much as I lock myself in," I explained.

"I observe," he smiled, "that you are already exhibiting the eccentricities of a writer."

While I prepared to go out with him, Debs stood by my table examining a rack of books. He picked up the biography of Romain Rolland, by Stefan Zweig.

"Someone sent me that book while I was in Atlanta, but I did not have time to read it. I have very great admiration for Rolland, and here and there I have read some of his shorter things."

I asked Debs if he had read "Jean Christophe."

"That is his novel, isn't it? No, I never read it, but I know something about it from the reviews it received."

I asked him what he admired about Rolland.

"I admire the wonderful isolation of his own soul. His ability to stand alone. That is so rare in our common life that a man must have divine courage to achieve it."

I felt like jumping out of my skin with joy when I heard him say that, for I have known many people who had attempted to isolate themselves in splendid singular purpose in order that they might be able to

merge their hearts with the common whole and had seemingly failed.

I asked him how it was that when he referred to his imprisonment that he spoke of it as being "in Atlanta" instead of in the penitentiary.

"If there is anyone who does not know that you are an ex-convict and you spoke about when you were 'in Atlanta,' they might suppose that you were merely a visitor there."

He looked at me and smiled. "Well, you see, I was never in prison. The spirit of me was never garbed in convict's clothing. My clay was in Atlanta. My soul was free. My spirit was in Atlanta, as it was elsewhere. Not in Atlanta's penitentiary."

#### **Movies Recall His Western Days.**

And so we went to the movies. A fine spring rain was falling, and I urged Debs to go back to the house and get his raincoat.

"You are so solicitous of my health and general well-being that I almost feel as though I am in your care." And he strolled back, taking long, swinging steps across the side lawn of his home, got his coat from a hook by the side door, and joined me on the pavement. In a few moments we were in the bright lights of Wabash avenue, or Main Street, as some Terre Hauteans choose to call it, headed for the Crescent Theater on Wabash avenue at 7th street. I asked him why he chose that theater. It was one of the smallest on the street.

"Why, because they are showing a Tom Mix picture. Do you like his pictures?"

I confessed my ignorance of them.

"Well, I like them because they are all of Western stuff, portraying a phase of American life that is no more, but which I knew so well in those pioneer days of the rugged West."

Although I edged up to the ticket booth and planked down half a dollar, Debs swept the money from the grasping fingers of the lady cashier, thrust it back into my hand and pushed me out of the way.

"This is not allowed in Terre Haute. You must behave yourself or you will be severely rebuked." I protested that merely because he stood six feet two, as against my five feet five, and that his years exactly doubled mine, that was no reason why he should offend my sporting impulse. He looked at me in mock disdain, and we passed into the darkness of the theater. The main picture was half over, but Debs became interested in it instantly. As he watched the changing film, he spun stories to me of Western life out of the pages of his memory that were by far more thrilling and romantic and realistic than any of those conjured up in the imagination of Tom Mix and his director.

He spoke of the early days at Goldfield, Tonopah, Cripple Creek, Salt Lake City and others where congregated those early pioneers and men of the world who won and lost fortunes and homes on the roulette wheel, the dice, the deck of cards and the flip of a coin. I recall that one picture in the reel was flashed showing a scene in a barroom with cowgirls and cowboys, dancing and roughing it generally, and Debs remarked: "How vivid all that is to me. I have been in places like that hundreds of times. Have sat with

those girls, talked with them, heard their stories. What real women they are. The nobility of their characters surpasses anything that the average modern girl knows about. I believe that the noble, courageous woman is nobler and more courageous than the noble and courageous man."

"I trace that remark down to your inherent chivalry," I said.

"It isn't a matter of my chivalry. It is a matter of fact. I insist upon it."

"Well, sometimes when we are not so engrossed with Tom Mix we will discuss that," and for the moment we let it pass.

"What were you doing in the West in those days that you speak of?"

"Organizing the miners. Those were in the 'Western Federation' days. It was a tough job, and many was the time that I knew I was taking my life in my hands by attempting to form labor unions in that wild and woolly country."

He said that the first time he ever met Mother Jones was out there in the West in those early days of labor unions of miners.

### **Excoriates Billy Sunday.**

A friend in Charlestown, W. Va., had sent Debs some clippings from the local paper of that city about the visit of Billy Sunday, during which the so-called evangelist took occasion to assail all radicals in general and Socialists and Communists in particular. The paper containing Mr. Sunday's remarks was, of course, friendly to plutocracy and mention was made in the article of the fact that President Hanrahan of the

Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad had placed at the disposal of Mr. Sunday and his party the best equipment that the railroad company afforded. The paper naively quoted President Hanrahan as saying that he considered having Sunday's presence in that community "a good investment," the obvious inference being that the industrial interests, of which the railroad company was a prime and moving factor, desired that Sunday should use his talents in dissuading the West Virginia miners from affiliating with organized labor.

Quotations from Sunday's address were given on the first page of the paper and one or two references were made to Debs and the calamity that would befall the United States and its people if he were President.

I shall give a few excerpts from Mr. Sunday's tirade as printed in the West Virginia newspaper that was sent to Debs:

"I cannot believe that God had anything to do with the creation of these (radicals) human buzzards. I'd rather be in hell with Cleopatra, John Wilkes Booth and Charles Guiteau than to live on earth with such human lice."

"There is a certain type of radical right here in West Virginia that is so rotten that if his sire were the devil, his mother Emma Goldman, and his birthplace hell, he would disgrace his father, outrage his mother and pollute his birthplace."

"It would be the greatest calamity of history if Eugene V. Debs ever became president of the United States. But he never will. He'll never get to first base. Wouldn't it be a fine place to live in if Debs were President? He'd have Victor Berger vice-president, Alexander Howat secretary of state, and Bill Haywood attorney general. Then hell would hold a jubilee and heaven hang a crepe on her door."

"I hope the United Mine Workers of America will not

stand by and see John L. Lewis deposed and old Howat put in his place. Lewis is conservative. Howat is radical. I am a friend of the union men. I have championed the cause of the union man all my life, but I'm dead against the radical in whatever form he may appear. He's the bird I'm after. America, I call you back to God!"

"These radicals would turn the milk of human kindness into limburger cheese and give a polecat convulsions. If I were the Lord for about fifteen minutes, I'd smash the bunch so hard that there would be nothing left for the devil to levy on but a bunch of whiskers and a bad smell."

"Every woman in Russia between the ages of 14 and 45 is a common prostitute under the Soviet system. That's the gang that would feast on American institutions."

I found Debs pacing up and down the floor of his library and an expression on his face that conveyed to me a feeling that he was keyed up about something. Almost before I had time to sit down and collect my thoughts for the morning talk, he thrust into my hand the clippings from the Charlestown paper, and asked if I knew that Sunday was in West Virginia. Clippings were heavily penciled and underscored, and he immediately drew my attention to a statement of Billy Sunday that all women in Russia between the ages of 14 and 45 years were prostitutes under the Soviet system. I read it and smiled. Debs was furious:

"I wish I had the physical strength to go to Charlestown and meet that vulture on a public platform. I would strip him to his naked hide and demand that he eat that insult against a race of noble women. God damn him! Hanrahan is right when

he says that Billy Sunday is a good investment to the railroad company and the mine operators. Think of a man posing as an evangel of Sweet Jesus using such vile language in describing a condition about which he is as ignorant as the swine that he emulates! I would say to him: 'Billy Sunday, if you say that all Russian women are prostitutes, you are a vile, filthy-minded liar and too soiled to look upon a decent woman.' I would put him in a position that might induce the West Virginia miners to invite Mr. Sunday to quit their community. Everybody who knows me knows that I am opposed to force and violence, but when I read stuff like this, which gets first-page publicity in capitalist newspapers, the purpose being to keep helpless men and women and children in slavery, I get wrought up about it and feel like going on the warpath. You notice in there that Billy Sunday says that the miners should stick by President John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers and have nothing to do with Alexander Howat. That is cute. The mine operators have told Sunday that Lewis is conservative, and they are right. Howat, who is in jail in Kansas, has the right idea of a labor union; that is why he is in jail.

"Lewis and his crowd have turned against Howat in exactly the same manner that the chiefs of the four railroad brotherhoods turned against me when my associates and I organized the American Railroad Union and went to jail in furtherance of the idea of industrial unionism. The United Mine Workers of America never had one president but who was conservative and, in the last analysis, inimical to the



revolutionary interest of labor. Every single president that the United Mine Workers has had got a good job, and those who are dead left comfortable sums of money, bearing testimony to their service to the plutocrats. Take John Mitchell as one illuminating example of what I mean. I believe John Mitchell left \$200,000 and had a comfortable berth on the New York State Labor Board, or something or other."

### **The Craft Union.**

"Capitalism created the craft union," said Debs, "and in many cases chose the officers to head them. Gompers would not hold his position year after year unless he was satisfactory to Wall Street. He fools nobody. Imagine a labor leader drawing the salary of a plutocrat! Wearing a frock coat and dining with the enemies of the workers. I know of my own knowledge that a number of the grand chiefs of the railroad brotherhoods are considered rich men by some shopmen and switchmen. Labor is not satisfied with having a chief. He must be a grand chief."

I drew Debs' attention to the fact that the official organ of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers had refused to accept a paid advertisement from the publishers of my biography of Debs.

"I could have told you in advance that they would not accept it, and even if they had it would have been injudicious advertising, for I doubt very much if the average railroad man reads one book a year, and the one he selects to read would certainly not be a life of me. Their publications have been filled with eulogistic obituary notices to the effect that: 'Be it Resolved, That God, in His infinite wisdom, saw fit to take this

dear brother of ours to heavenly rest,' and so on and so on—not a word about industrial unionism or any suggestion of current economic and social facts.”

### **Gompers and Foster.**

An item appeared in a Terre Haute newspaper dealing with the criticism made by Samuel P. Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labor, against William Z. Foster, insurgent labor leader of Chicago, in which Mr. Gompers took occasion to call Foster a “Bolshevik.”

“Anybody who stands for progress in the American labor movement is a Bolshevik in the eyes of Mr. Gompers,” said Debs. “During the war he and his co-officials delivered the American labor movement, bag and baggage, into the shambles of Europe and into the nets of the profiteers. He was cheek by jowl with the capitalists and was a welcome guest at their festive boards. Foster has the right idea of a labor organization, but the pity of it is that he will not be able to make any headway with industrial unionism as long as Gompers and his crowd hold labor by the throat.”

This comment led me to further question Debs about Mr. Gompers' visit to Atlanta prison, where he was invited by the warden to address the convict body in the auditorium of the penitentiary, after which he met Debs in the office of the warden.

“Mr. Gompers received a mild ovation when he appeared on the platform, but when he finished his speech the convicts expressed what they felt in silence. You know, many of those men have been members of unions in the outside world and those who had

such affiliation seemed to know that Gompers had nothing to tell them. The others were indifferent."

"What did Mr. Gompers say to you when you met him personally?" I asked.

"The meeting was very brief."

"Who spoke first?"

"I did. I said 'How do you do, Mr. Gompers?'"

"What did he say?" I broke in.

"He said 'How do you do, Gene?' Then in the next breath he remarked: 'Many years ago you called me Sam. Can't we get back on those terms again?'"

"What did you reply?"

"I think I said, 'Maybe we can some time.' But I do not want to give the impression that there is anything personally unfriendly between us. Gompers stands for craft unionism and I stand for industrial democracy."

"Did you discuss the labor movement with him?"

"No, we just spoke of generalities and I went back to my duties in the hospital."

### **Gompers in the A. R. U. Days.**

This reminds me of a talk I had with Debs a few days later about Mr. Gompers. I asked him what was Mr. Gompers' attitude toward him when he was president of the American Railway Union and led the great strike of 1894.

"Gompers did everything he could to break the strike. He was then, as now, hand in glove with the employers so far as any actual freedom of the workers was concerned."

"But he did wire you felicitations, did he not, upon your release from Woodstock jail?"

"Yes, I remember that. Gompers had been invited to make an address at the gigantic meeting in Chicago the night of my release from Woodstock and he sent a telegram regretting his inability to be present and congratulating me upon what he said was my loyalty and fidelity to the working class. Mr. Gompers knows that I did considerable pioneer work in building up the American Federation of Labor. I organized many of its unions and in those early years toured many states, addressing the workers in its behalf, but I soon arrived at the unalterable conviction that craft unionism is economically and socially unsound; that it pits one group of workers against another in the same trade or industry; that it makes it necessary for one group of workers to scab upon another and increase the competition for jobs. Intellectually, Gompers has not moved one step in 40 years. He has built up a labor movement that is highly beneficial to the Chamber of Commerce and the business and banking element generally. That is why he is able to continue his leadership of the A. F. of L."

"But what did he do or not do in the A. R. U. strike?"

"We received little or no support from the leaders of the American Federation of Labor. Mr. Gompers' attitude was identical with that of the grand chiefs of the railroad brotherhoods. He was an apt scholar of P. M. Arthur, grand chief of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, who was cheek by jowl with the Railroad Managers' Association."

### **Christ and Magdalene.**

We were talking one day about Christ. He is a

character in human history that never fails to animate Debs and causes him to talk at length of the many sides of the Carpenter. I expressed the belief that the intensely human side of Christ had not been revealed, that the world seemed to know a great deal of what Christ thought, but little of what he did on the purely personal side.

"Does it seem possible," I said to Debs, "that a man so human, so magnanimous and beautiful in His love, should have denied Himself the association of woman? Yet the world does not know of a single love episode in the life of Christ."

"I think that is a most interesting point to raise," said Debs. "I have thought about it myself at different times, and I must confess I have some opinion with regard to it."

I was eager to know what it was.

"It has been my belief that Jesus had an intense passionate love for Mary Magdalene. I believe that if the real story were known it would prove to be one of the most beautiful love episodes in history. Consider this Man, Jesus, looking with tenderness upon the Magdalene, who had come to Him with aching heart, seeking His redemptive influence to purge her soul of 'the Seven Devils.' You remember how horrified the snobs became when they saw Jesus talking to another woman, whom they scorned as a prostitute. And you remember the answer of sweet Jesus: 'Let him among you who is without sin cast the first stone!' And the painful pause that ensued, and how they slunk away to their holes like rats and then Jesus asked the unnamed woman if any man had condemned her, and

she replied, 'Nay, Lord'; and her woman's heart must have thrilled when Jesus said to her: 'Then neither do I condemn thee. Go, and sin no more.' If there did exist warm human love between Jesus and Mary of Magda, how beautiful it must have been and what an inspiration it would be to those who are horrified by the thought of such a union, to know of it."

This was very interesting to me, Debs' reference to Jesus in that manner, for I had often heard him refer to the Nazarene in other human terms, as for instance: "He was not always meek and lowly, but a full red-blooded, vibrant Jewish agitator, who could hate injustice and rebuke those who oppressed the poor and exploited and robbed them. Consider the episode of the temple in Jerusalem," he would say. "No meek and lowly ever-suffering Jesus could have gone in there with a whip and lashed the money changers, dashed their silver to the ground, released their oxen and admonished the poor for obeying their masters."

Before I left Terre Haute Debs gave me a print of Jesus which he had kept in his cell, pinned at the head of his bed, and which he later removed to his room in the hospital of Atlanta penitentiary, where he spent 32 months of his term. That print is dated by his hand, "Atlanta, Ga., April 21, 1920."

### **Lincoln Steffens and Russia.**

One morning Debs remarked that he had received a letter from Lincoln Steffens in which the journalist and humanitarian requested an interview with the Socialist leader at Terre Haute.

"I have asked Steffens not to come just yet. We must get these articles done and then I want to go

away to see if I can get the rest that my physicians say I require, and which I know I need if I am to be of any more use to myself and to those who are interested in what I can do."

"What do you think Steffens wants?" I inquired. I knew that Steffens was interested in the inner workings of the Russian Soviet Government, as I had spoken to him at some length on that subject after his visit to Debs in Atlanta shortly before he was released.

"I presume Steffens wants to talk about Russia. He has written me several times on the subject asking if I would make a lecture tour in behalf of the famine sufferers. You know I would give anything in the world if I could do that, for the Russian cause is high in my heart."

### **Russia's Dictatorship.**

"Do you subscribe to the Russian program? I mean to their mandates with respect to Socialist affairs outside of Russia, or have you some mental reservation with respect to those matters?"

"I think you know in a fairly general way what my ideas are about Russia and the famous twenty-one points, which I understand have gone the same route of President Wilson's Fourteen Points. It seems to me that outside of the fact that Russia has achieved a social revolutionary triumph, she has at the same time actually swapped dictators. Considering the fact that 80 per cent of Russia's population are illiterate and that under the dictatorship of the Czar they did as they were told, it stands to reason that since they are still illiterate they must do as

they are told under the dictatorship of Lenin, Trotzky and their confreres. To me that is not freedom. It does not approach what I have in my mind as social liberty. The Russian peasant and worker must do, not as he wishes or as his conscience dictates, but as he is told, or suffer the consequences, which I understand have been most severe in many instances. Russia has made an international platitude of the term 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat.' In fact, they have established a dictatorship of intellectuals over the proletariat. There is not a single one of the actual leaders of the Russian Soviet Government who is a proletarian. They are intellectuals. Consider the real men at the head of Russia. Who are they? Lenin, a social scientist; Trotzky, a former reporter in New York. Zinovieff, Radek, Tchitcherin, Litvinoff, Krassin, Joffe—they are all intellectuals.

"Russia has no Communism. Communism presupposes intellectual and spiritual enlightenment beyond Socialism, and if 80 per cent of Russians are illiterate can we in truth say and believe that Russia is intellectually and spiritually advanced over, let us say, England, America or France?

### **Socialism and Communism.**

"There can be no Communism except through Socialism, which must follow capitalism as the dawn follows night. It is unbelievable that a country ridden for centuries by the blackest tyranny can with one gesture leap into Communism, in which the better, finer and nobler qualities of man would have



an opportunity for free and untrammled expression."

Debs had been speaking earnestly on this subject and it was evident that he had been thinking long and deeply upon it. I reminded him that several years ago he had issued a statement in which he said, "I am a Bolshevik from the top of my head to the sole of my feet."

"What did you mean by that, if now you criticise what to me is the logical result of the Bolshevik temperament?"

"I meant exactly what I said. At that time the Bolshevik revolution had succeeded the Kerensky regime and had not yet launched upon a systematic endeavor to disrupt every Socialist party in the world. I am heartily in favor of every step of Russia's revolution as long as they fight capitalism, but when they proceed to dictate to the Socialist parties of other countries as to how they should conduct themselves, then it seems to me to be time to back up, not lessening our full and hearty support of the Russian revolution, but in preserving the integrity of our own parties which have been built up through long years of tears, toil and weary sacrifices.

"It is impossible for Russia to maintain a Communist government until she has passed through the various stages of Socialist experiment.

"I never had any illusions that Socialism was the last word in economic, political and industrial development. I do believe that Communism will succeed Socialism and that after that we shall come to anarchism until governments will finally slough off. But that will be ages hence."

"Are you pessimistic about the chances for radical social change in the United States?" I asked.

"I am not pessimistic about anything. Every morning I feel as spry as a mountain goat except when I feel as lame as a wounded lion."

### **"Destroy The King, Save The Man"**

One evening at dinner Debs spoke of the atrocities which the Russian revolutionists were reported to have committed not only against active or potentially active imperialists such as the former czar and his family, but counter-revolutionists, in which class they seemed to have put Socialists who embraced milder methods of achieving industrial and political reform within the Soviet Government.

"My blood boiled," said Debs, "when I read the other day of the heinous murder of the czar, his wife and daughters. The crime was of such a revolting nature that it confounds the intelligent sensibilities of anybody who calls himself a Socialist. The Russians excuse it not only on the ground that the czar and his family alive might be menacing to the revolution, but also justify their crime by pointing to the fact that the reigning imperialists were likewise guilty of brutal and hideous murders of Russian workers. For myself, there is no excuse for Socialists and free men to resurrect the archaic, Mosaic law.

"Socialists should set an example by treating their opponents with kindness and consideration and not resorting to the gallows, the knout and the pistol, as is the custom of their adversaries. I believe with Thomas Paine, that we should 'destroy the king, but save the man.'

"If I were in Lenin's position, I would say to the imperialists and counter-revolutionists who seem to menace the Soviet Government that there was useful work for them to do and that they would be paid in accordance to their contribution to society. I have faith enough in the average man, whoever he may be and wherever he is, that he would not fail to respond to kindness and social understanding when it was presented to him humanely and with due consideration for his own integrity and manhood. We are building a new society on the basis of justice, kindness, consideration, reciprocity, respect for the feelings and integrity of our fellow men. If we are not building on this basis, then I have wasted 40 years of my life in striving to broadcast humane and beneficent ideas among my fellow men."

#### **Emma Goldman's Articles.**

During this period Emma Goldman, exiled from the United States to Russia, because of her opposition to the world war in which America was engaged, was contributing a series of articles to American newspapers based upon conditions in Russia as she found them during her term of enforced residence in that country. These articles were dated from Stockholm and were purchased by the New York World and syndicated by them to a number of American newspapers, among which was the Chicago Herald Examiner. Every morning I clipped the Goldman articles and, after reading them, took them to Debs.

After the fifth article I asked him what impression he had formed of the Goldman articles.

"There are two points of view that come to my mind with respect to them," he said. "First, there is the

ethics of the situation. It seems to me to come with bad grace from Emma Goldman to run to the capitalist press with her critical castigation of the Soviet Government. All of us know that Emma Goldman could not get a line in the capitalist newspapers of this country unless she attacked Russia."

"That is true," I said, "but could she get her articles into the press that is entirely friendly to Soviet Russia? Where and to whom is she to tell her story? Surely," I continued, "Emma Goldman has a perfect right to tell what she knows about Soviet Russia."

"Yes, I concede her that right, but it is unfortunate that she considered it necessary to take her complaint to the capitalist press."

"Well," I urged, "if the capitalists can get any comfort out of what Emma Goldman is saying through their medium they are welcome to it."

"I have admired Emma Goldman very much," Debs countered, "she is one of the sincerest women I know. Of course she has always been against us (Socialists), but, on the whole, she has fought fairly and courageously for what she believes."

I asked Debs if he had read the two Goldman articles describing her interview with Prince Kropotkin.

"Yes, I read them. Isn't it terrible to think that a man of the human qualities of Kropotkin, who renounced his political nobility, consecrated his life to the well-being of the Russian workers, who foretold the dream of the revolutionary experiment, was at last fated to be persecuted by the very people for whom he gave his all and denied at last the fruit of his struggle and sacrificial years. It is unbelievable that the Russian So-

cialist Government should not recognize its own friends."

I reminded Debs of a remark that Arthur Brisbane made upon this very subject in his newspaper column. Brisbane said: "The working class is remarkable to this extent: it never forgets an enemy and never remembers a friend."

"That is cute," Debs remarked, "but as for Brisbane, well I will tell you a story about him some day."

### **Some Viewpoints of His Sister.**

I was anxious to tell Debs of a talk I had one evening with his sister, Mrs. Emily Mailloux. She had invited me to come to her apartment on West 82nd street, near Riverside Drive, New York City, after reading several of my newspaper articles describing the return of her brother to his home from Atlanta prison.

It was evening when I projected this subject to Debs and he was sitting in his rocker by a table smoking his pipe. I was sitting with my back to a window between his roll-top desk and table, and had full view of his face, lighted by the rays of a lamp. He was at once interested.

"Yes, I would like to have you tell me about your visit with Emily."

"There are some phases of our talk that I am afraid will not be specially pleasing to you, but I am sure you will understand and will not be vexed."

"Surely, go ahead. Let me have the full charge. I will take it without even putting a blind on my eyes," he said, laughing and refilling his pipe.

"In the first place, I had never met Mrs. Mailloux

until I called that evening in the latter part of January. Of course, I knew that you had a sister in New York. She called me on the telephone at my office and said that she had read many of my articles about you and had also read my biography of your life, which, she admitted, she kept secreted in her bookcase for fear a casual visitor might take it out and read it."

"Is that so?" Debs put in. "What did she say was the matter with it?"

"Well, she told me over the telephone and later repeated in our talk together that there were some parts of the book that mortified her and hinted that I had misrepresented her family. Her complaint was put in all kindness. I assured her that whatever errors one found in the book were not intentional and that they had occurred, if such errors existed, through the fact that the book, as you know, was written on order of the publishers and done with great speed.

"When I called, Mrs. Mailloux strove to impress upon me that your father and mother were not in any sense poverty-stricken and that you had no ground to say that you were born and raised in the working-class."

Debs smiled at this, and blew a curl of smoke against the ceiling. By his silence he invited me to go on with the story. I next attempted to describe to Debs the scene of my talk with his sister. As I recall it, the house was a three or four-story gray-stone front with great ironwrought doors and giving at once the impression to the visitor that here

was a home built upon something infinitely more substantial than the competence earned by a workman, as most of us understand the latter term. One entered immediately into a spacious reception hall, in the far corner of which stood a grandfather's clock that chimed the hours. There was a winding staircase of some heavy, dark wood, possibly American walnut, and this led to a spacious front room which looked to me to be more on the order of an art gallery than a sitting room. The furnishings were possibly those of an old French period. Heavily upholstered and enameled chairs were drawn up before a great fireplace, inlaid with myriad-colored tiles. The floors, of course, were parquet, adorned with ample rugs that might prove the awkward undoing of one who failed to tread upon them firmly. Against a large wall stood a grand piano and it seemed to me that here and there were handsome glass cases containing small objects of art and miscellaneous bric-a-brac. Heavy tapestries hung in spaces not occupied by heavily gilt framed canvases.

"Of course, Mrs. Mailloux first wanted to know all about you, how you were, how you looked and to what extent your prison life had made inroads upon your health. I enlightened her on all these points as best I could and told her of the triumphant homecoming that was accorded to you by your townspeople. She was intensely interested in all this and inquired about her brother Theodore and his family. She said that I was the first person who had ever taken the time or embraced the occasion

to write specially about Theodore, and her direct mention of this made me feel at once that she held high affection for him.

“‘My brother Theodore,’ said Mrs. Mailloux, ‘has always been willing to stay in the background. He has served Eugene in a thousand ways at the expense of himself and with complete and marvelous self-abnegation.’”

To this statement Debs nodded his head in ready assent.

“By way of attempting to convince me that her parents were not of lowly birth, she said that your father came from well-to-do parents in Colmar, Alsace, and that your grandfather was a member of some of the most exclusive clubs in Colmar to which your father would have had easy entry by right of inheritance. She said that your father’s parents had wished him to marry an heiress and thus perpetuate the convenience of the bourgeois estate, but your father was obstinate and was determined to marry his sweetheart, who became your mother. This, said Mrs. Mailloux, roused your grandfather’s indignation to such an extent that his self-willed son concluded to follow his own star, no matter if it should drop out of the sky. She said that your father left Colmar with \$6,000 in his pocket and came to America on a sailing vessel that took him, I believe, something like two months. As the boat neared the shore of New York an American business man approached your father, so Mrs. Mailloux said, and interested him in a tobacco deal to the extent of the \$6,000 that your father had. I



smiled when Mrs. Mailloux told me this, for I had no idea that those scheming and skinning Americans were in existence in those early days.

### **Backgrounds of His Father.**

"Mrs. Mailloux said that when your father arrived in New York he stopped at the Shakespeare Hotel, near Park Row, on the site of which there is now a newsboys' home. I think she said that he went into some small business in New York with another man, who robbed him.

"Mrs. Mailloux said that shortly after your father landed he wrote continuously to his sweetheart in Colmar, urging her to come to America and join him in marriage. She said that your mother was very reluctant to do this despite her love for your father, for the reason that she felt that his life lay on a different plane and that he should take advantage of the pecuniary interests that were his should he decide to return to Colmar and continue the life that his parents had ordered for him, surrounded, as it might be, by the security of the bourgeoisie.

"Finally, said Mrs. Mailloux, your father wrote a letter to your mother threatening to commit suicide unless she joined him in New York on a certain day, when he knew a boat would arrive from France. That letter brought your mother to your father's side, and they were married in New York City and went to live in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, where, I believe, Mrs. Mailloux said your eldest sister, Mrs. Michel, was born."

I felt rather embarrassed at running over the story of the parents of Debs, who sat before me. Yet there were some points in the story as told by his sister

that I felt might be subjected to at least mental scrutiny, and so I continued to sketch what Mrs. Mailloux had said.

“Your father and mother packed their household goods and shipped them to Cincinnati, but instead of arriving at their destination they went down the Ohio River and into the Mississippi and to New Orleans, where they were lost. Nothing daunted, Mr. and Mrs. Debs went on to Terre Haute, where they stayed but a little while because your father became afflicted with an itch, so they returned to New York, remained a little while and started west again for Terre Haute, where they settled. I understood that your father and mother selected Terre Haute because a little colony of French Canadians had gathered there and with whom they could speak their native tongue.”

“I find no objection with the story thus far,” said Debs.

“Well, maybe you will raise an objection when I tell you that Mrs. Mailloux said that your father never was a working man, in the proletarian sense. She said that he was primarily a litterateur, interested in poetry and painting, that he was a connoisseur and patron of the arts. Yet I was somewhat puzzled when she told me how your father went to work in a pork-packing house on the banks of the Wabash, toiled from dawn until twilight for wages that scarcely permitted the indulgence of life's necessities; of how your mother would take his lunches to him in a basket and sit with him while he ate; of how your mother wept night after night with the knowledge that your father labored so hard in order to earn a mere pittance that

inadequately provided for the little brood they were attempting to raise.

"It struck me as being inconsistent with her earlier statement that your parents were not hard working people when she said that finally your father had to give up his job in the packing house because of the arduous and exacting character of the labor, only to feel the necessity a little later of laying ties on the first railroad that was to connect Indianapolis with St. Louis.

"It was a highly dramatic story that Mrs. Mailloux unfolded to me that night. She pictured your father standing at the window of his little cabin, watching men survey what was to become the railroad line and later on witnessing laborers digging trenches in the sandy soil that would soon be ribboned with steel and thus connect Terre Haute with the world."

#### **Laid Ties for Railroad.**

"Yes," said Debs, "my father helped to lay the ties on the first railroad that came through Terre Haute, and it was on that railroad that I first began to fire a locomotive."

"But," I put in, instantly, "Mrs. Mailloux claims that your father did not work on the railroad for more than two days because of the blisters on his hands by swinging the pick."

Debs nodded.

"At this time, said Mrs. Mailloux, your mother had managed to save from your father's earnings the sum of \$40 and she determined that she would go into business, would build up a little store which she and your father would tend, so that he would not have to

work for wages any more. One day your mother took the entire savings and went to a wholesale grocery store and invested the full amount in groceries and miscellaneous articles. She moved the parlor furniture out of her front room, improvised shelves and cases and notified her neighbors that she had things for sale. Mrs. Mailloux told me how your father, with tears in his eyes, surveyed that sad collection of groceries and wondered what in the world he would do, now that his \$40 was gone.

“Mrs. Mailloux’s eyes glistened with tears of pride and joy as she told me how, in a little while, your mother, with your father’s assistance, was able to realize from the sale of her goods almost double the amount of her investment. And so, from a little acorn the giant oak grew, and I understood what she meant when she remarked later that your family was the first one in Terre Haute to own a piano and a bicycle, both of which seemed to prove to her that your parents were not of the working class.

“Mrs. Mailloux had sketched very briefly how the little store grew out of the residence and became a business demanding larger quarters and a more elaborate array of stock. Of course, I knew without her telling me that your father subsequently was able to buy a corner at 11th street and Wabash avenue for his store and residence. Your sister insists that some day she will write her own book about the family because she claims that its origin has been subjected to considerable misrepresentation. I asked her if she meant to write your biography, and she replied by saying that she would write the story of the Debs

family. I ventured that there was no public interest in the Debs family other than the fame that had come to it by virtue of your prominence.

"One of the most interesting documents that she showed me was the passport of your father when he came to America.

### **Building Up a Library.**

"Mrs. Mailloux told me how much your father loved French literature and that in the course of years he had been able to accumulate a very worthy French library which at his death he gave to the Terre Haute Public Library. His neighbors, when they wanted to purchase a painting, consulted your father and asked him to view it before striking the bargain, so high an estimate did they place upon his appreciation and knowledge of art.

"Your sister said with considerable vehemence that she was aggrieved beyond words after reading in a Socialist or labor paper some years ago that you had been denied the benefit of an elementary education because of the poverty of your parents. She quoted the article literally to the effect that at the age of fourteen, while you were sitting in the classroom, you heard the knock of poverty upon the schoolroom door, and answered the summons by going to work in the old Vandalia paint shops. Mrs. Mailloux says that is not true; that you deliberately ran away from school because you chose to go to work and that since you were an obstinate boy, your father enlisted the assistance of a Mr. Solomon, in charge of the Vandalia railroad paint shops here in Terre Haute, to provide employment for you, but

more especially because Mr. Solomon spoke French and your father wanted you to know that language."

I needed only to watch the expression of Debs to be convinced that his sister had given a mistaken, though undoubtedly sincere, version of her brother's early struggles. He was very patient, only breaking into the narrative now and then with a casual inquiry such as: "Is that so?" or "Did she say that?" or "My dear sister is mistaken on that point."

### **Debs and His School Books.**

"Mrs. Mailloux says that time and again your parents sought to persuade you to return to your school books, but you would not do it. She said that your initiation into railroad life was quite accidental and of your own choice. She put it this way: that one night when you were working late, an engineer came puffing into the paint shops complaining that his fireman was drunk and had failed to show up and asked if there was any one of the boys who would volunteer to go into the cabin and stoke the furnace. She said that you were the first one to volunteer to go on the engine that night and that you liked the thrill so much that you refused to return to the paint shops. Your mother and father were much annoyed and feared for your safety, and did everything possible to change your mind, but you turned a deaf ear to them and insisted upon being a railroad man.

"According to Mrs. Mailloux, their constant insistence annoyed you to such an extent that you ran away, landing in St. Louis, where you fired an engine out of that city. Your parents did not know where

you were until one day an engineer came into Terre Haute and told your father. Thereupon he and your mother invented the ruse that one of your sisters was dangerously ill at home and that if you wanted to see her alive you should return at once. Their letter fetched you and you came home, only to find all well and happy. The appeal of your parents was renewed to dissuade you from your chosen career. She said that you told them that if they did not allow you to fire an engine you would do nothing at all. And that you did not work for almost a year. Neither did you go to school. Now, those are very serious charges, indicating a recalcitrant and wilful boy, and I would like to hear your rebuttal."

#### **Longed to Play Like Other Boys.**

Debs smiled, as he refilled his pipe, remarking: "I told you a little while ago that I was through with courts for all time, and if you mean to put me on the witness stand we will declare war right here and we shall soon find who is in contempt."

"But," said Debs, his face becoming serious, "I know better than my sister why I went to work at fourteen. I went to work because I had to, because I knew that my mother and father needed my pennies. My sister couldn't know that. She was too young. All that she has told you was said with perfect sincerity as far as she knew, but she doesn't know my whole story or the beginning of it, by any means. My dear sister doesn't know that when my class graduated I wept and longed to be counted with them, nor does she know how I longed to be

like other boys and enjoy the play that I saw them have after school hours, when I was at work mixing paints in the Vandalia shops.

"No, I didn't volunteer to go on the locomotive that night. I was pushed on it. I had to go. Employers are not in the habit of asking their help what they want to do, and I do not remember that those under whom I worked were any more beneficent as employers than are their prototypes today."

Debs rose from his chair, walked over to his desk and opened the middle drawer, where he found his old paint knife with a blade about three inches long.

"That was my first laboring tool. I worked two whole days to possess that knife. It cost me \$1."

I held it in my hand and noticed that on the blade near the handle Debs had carved his name. Secretly I hoped he might make me a gift of that paint knife, but I understood that if he had kept it for over half a century it must have a singular sentimental significance to him.

"When I left the Vandalia shops I beat my way on a train down the C. and E. I. to Evansville and took this knife with me as the tool of my trade. I didn't get a job in Evansville and I went to St. Louis, where I did get a job firing a locomotive.

"You see, my sister and I drifted apart after her marriage, and her life followed a different plane from mine and Theodore's. We remained in loving relation as brother and sister. That never changed. My sister does not understand the social purpose of our lives, although I am sure her sympathies are generous."



### His Sister Praises Lincoln.

I knew the latter to be true, and I was also aware that Mrs. Mailloux was far removed in psychological and social setting from her celebrated brother just returned from Atlanta penitentiary. I remember asking Mrs. Mailloux if she thought that Eugene would live in history as Lincoln has lived. In putting my inquiry I anticipated ready affirmation, and I was somewhat surprised when she seemed confused over my question and said she did not know, that the future was too remote. I recall, too, asking her who was her hero and I naturally anticipated that she would name her elder brother. She replied without any hesitation, Abraham Lincoln, and followed it up by saying that she thought Lincoln was the greatest man that ever lived, and that there would never be another figure in American history to compare with him. When I left Mrs. Mailloux I was somewhat bewildered and astonished, due, I am sure, to the fact that for 15 years I had heard Debs spoken of in the most laudatory terms and things I had read about him from the world's choicest spirits, from the greatest humanitarians and scholars, coupled with my own very intimate association with him had convinced me beyond all peradventure of doubt that this brother of Mrs. Mailloux's was destined to live in the hearts of Americans as long as the English tongue was spoken. I allowed something for family modesty which, however, I mentally countered with the wayward speculation that had the mother of Jesus been asked who, in her opinion, was the greatest living man, she would have had no hesitancy in claiming the crown for Christ.

### **Honors His Nobility and Courage.**

I would not give the impression here that Mrs. Mailloux evinced the slightest humiliation from even her point of view because of her brother's prominence in the working class or because he was an ex-convict. Mrs. Mailloux declared that she honored Eugene for having the courage to stand by his principles, and that in adhering to them he had taken his medicine like a man without one flicker or question. She told me that she always knew that Eugene would stand by his convictions, no matter if the penalty were the gibbet or the gallows and before this sublime courage she declared she bowed her head.

Illustrating this, she told me how she was thrilled when she saw pictures of her brother upon his release from Atlanta prison flashed upon the screen in a moving picture theater.

"It was right over here on Broadway," she said, "and my husband and I were sitting in the theater, when suddenly they flashed pictures of 'Gene waving goodby to the convicts in the penitentiary, and I nearly leaped out of my seat with joy. He looked so grand and so noble. Yet I was the only person in that theater who evinced any real interest in seeing him, and I was proud that he was my brother."

### **Among His Town Folk.**

"The old Terre Haute is all gone," said Debs one evening, while he and I were walking up Wabash avenue, stopping at Eighth street, where we entered a restaurant.

"When I came back from Atlanta," he said, "it seemed almost as though I were in a strange city.

Not that I was away long enough for the town to change, but I realized more than I ever had during my continuous residence here that the old landmarks were gone and the old faces had receded into the shadows."

We sat down at a marble-topped table and waited for the young waitress to serve us. Debs ordered milk and crackers and apple pie, and I went in for the more substantial Swiss cheese sandwich and coffee. As the waitress departed for the kitchen I wondered if she knew her elder patron. I had been in several cities with Debs on different occasions and I had seen him stopped many times on the street by people who recognized him instantly, yet during my month's sojourn in Terre Haute, when we were frequently on the streets, I noted the fact that only now and then was he accosted and then by some older citizen.

I had conjured up in my mind the picture that Debs was stopped by every Tom, Dick and Harry, and Mary, Martha and Susie, in his home town, but when I went about his city with him I discovered to my surprise that he could sometimes go the length of Wabash avenue virtually a stranger among his townfolk. I understood that this was what he probably had in mind when he remarked that the old town had given place to the new city, that a new generation had sprung up in the environs of his youth while other new faces had emigrated to the Hoosier town by virtue of its growing influence as a manufacturing and mining center. I recall remarking to him how strange it was that 30,000 men,

women and children should turn out in the streets when he returned from Atlanta and accord him such a hearty greeting as but very few Americans or noted visitors had ever received in this country. Only once before in my memory had I seen a city so completely unified in welcoming a fellow-citizen to his own hearthstone. That was when the late Theodore Roosevelt returned to New York from his African expedition in 1909 or 1910.

### **People Like Winning Side.**

“Well,” said Debs finally, “no man could be insensible to the magnificent demonstration that my return occasioned. Yet, I know perfectly well that if I were to go to the penitentiary again there would be the same silent indifference to my lot as there was when I left three years ago. People always like to be on the side of the winner. When I went to Moundsville I was a convict in the public’s estimation, but when I returned I was Gene Debs. That is the way of the world.”

When the waitress returned I employed every wile to win her favor for the check, but when Debs discovered my surreptitious maneuvering he turned on me with mock severity and remarked to the embarrassed young woman that age must be served before youth. He left her a half dollar as a tip and paid the check. Those who have ever been with Gene and Theodore know how impossible it is to spend their own money. Their generosity is spontaneous and to brook interference with it is to court sharp argument which inevitably ends in their victory.

We were merely idling up and down Wabash avenue that April evening, the streets crowded with miners who were on strike and their families running in and out of the stores; young girls and boys arm in arm and laughing, borrowing gladness from life and storing away roseate dreams of their future happiness. Terre Haute! How alive it was! Here was bubbling life, surely! At flood tide. There was neither place nor time for age here. I was reminded of what Theodore Dreiser had said about it: It had a seeking atmosphere. Lounging about the doorways of the two principal hotels and against cigar counters were sharp-looking young business men, and I thought about all these manifestations and wondered what they meant to the tall figure by whose side I was strolling.

As I left Debs in his library one morning he said that we would declare a holiday that evening and would embrace the invitation extended to him and myself by Dr. Madge Patton Stephens and her husband Wallace to join them in a picnic supper. For two or three days Gene had been considering this invitation and I knew that his desire was to pass it, for in those days he was reluctant to indulge social activities. He preferred to be alone, what with the innumerable demands that were being made upon him from all sides for statements to his party and articles for their papers.

#### **Recalls Familiar Scenes.**

“You can write your article this afternoon and finish it up by the time I call for you at your room, can’t you?” I said yes.

About 5 o'clock that afternoon I was going over the pages of his article when I heard a gentle tapping at the door, and opening it found Debs, his hat in his hand, asking if he were intruding. No matter how intimate Gene may be with a friend, he never fails to observe all of the courtesies of social intercourse and never drops to deadly familiarity. I noticed that he was wearing two overcoats and remarked about it.

"Well," he said, "one of them is what I would normally wear and the other is to substitute for the loss of the pound of flesh that I left behind in Atlanta prison."

We started out, preferring to walk part of the way to Dr. Stephens' home. It was a night in early April and there was a chill on the edge of the early spring evening. We walked out Chestnut street, crossed the Pennsylvania Railroad tracks where Debs pointed to an ancient roundhouse, the walls of which were a sooty gray, and indicated a smaller building beyond which he designated as the paint shops of the old Vandalia Railroad where he had worked as a boy. He said that many a night he had slept in that old roundhouse, his senses charmed by the rattle of the engines that often lulled him to sleep. We passed a charitable institution, the character of which I have forgotten, and Debs said that the bed in which he had been born was in that place, a contribution from his mother when it was founded.

Further up the street Debs pointed to the identical spot where he made his first political speech. We stopped a moment, and Debs surveyed the scene,

evidently very different now from what it was in those early days when that section of the city was a prairie. I asked him if his speeches always came easily to him, if he was what some called a "born orator"?

### **Struggled for an Education.**

"Heavens, no!" he ejaculated. "Nothing ever came easy to me, least of all my ability to express myself. I could not begin to tell you how diligently I struggled to make myself understood and how I burned the candle at both ends to acquire an education in my middle years that I might be able to fire the minds and touch the heartstrings of my audiences.

"I have heard some people spoken of as born orators or born poets, painters, writers and so on. Nature may endow some with genius, but I am sure I was omitted when her beneficent gifts were being passed around."

This seemed strange to me, for nearly everyone who has heard Debs make an address has considered him pre-eminently a matchless orator and one of the few truly great public speakers that America has produced. I do not believe he was born without that rare gift, for the very fact that he developed that singular ability over the many that he possesses convinced me that the power so to do was latent within him when his baby eyes beheld a strange world.

We turned into Gilbert street and Debs, gesturing with his long arm, fastened my imagination upon the buffaloes that used to roam in that vicinity where now stood uniform stucco houses and neat little

bungalows, each and every one sitting back from a patch of green and shrubbery as though they all had been ordered from the same factory. He told me his father used to go out in the early morning with his shotgun and hunting dogs and bring home a basketful of snipe and prairie chickens. It was so different now. The city extended far beyond the orderly rows of residences that stood before us, and here and there could be seen the tall funnels of factories rolling out clouds of smoke and smudging the landscape like the shadow of a wing of some evil bird.

In a few minutes we were at the home of Theodore Debs, whom we were to pick up on the way to the party. Theodore's wife, Gertrude, had prepared her share of the picnic bounty and I seized the basket, commenting that for my part we could sit down and begin the picnic. Debs pulled out of his pocket a fountain pen which he handed to Gertrude for her daughter, Marguerite, a handsome young woman who was at this time teaching in a normal school at Muncie. And so we four continued our walk to the trolley car, passing on the way a fire engine house where a group of firemen were sitting at a window playing checkers. Debs looked in and waved his hand, remarking to us, "The last time I saw those fellows, ten years ago, they were sitting at that very window playing checkers."

We rode for five or ten minutes on the trolley and after a walk of a few squares arrived at Dr. Stephens' home and found to our surprise that we were among the first arrivals.



### The Center of a Picnic Party.

It was not long after Debs arrived at the Stephens home when the large front room was filled with neighbors and visitors who had come to pay their informal respects to their townsman. There was one woman who had a little girl with her named Hortense and the moment Debs clapped his eyes upon her he thrust his hand into his coat pocket and pulled out several trinkets which he gave to her. I am sure that Debs did not know that this little girl would be present and he must have provided himself with those delicious nothings, possibly anticipating that there would be at least one child in the party. Gene picked the little girl up and sat her on his knee and told her one or two funny stories which the old folks enjoyed even more than little Hortense, who was too busy examining her gifts to listen.

There were possibly five or six couples in the room and husbands and wives seized every opportunity to tell Debs of their own triumphs and tribulations during the years that he had been away. Of course they wanted to hear Debs tell of his experiences, but more than that, they wanted to release their own. And for an hour or more the room buzzed with voices, old and young, pouring into his ear the odds and ends of their lives.

Debs sat almost in the middle of the room in a Morris chair and around him gathered his neighbors and friends. It was the first time they had seen him at close range since his return from Atlanta, except for the distant glance they had had of him on that

memorable night when more than 30,000 residents of his city turned out to welcome him home. About 9 o'clock Dr. Stephens announced that the picnic supper was ready, and one by one we filed into the spacious and beautiful dining room and took our places around the sides of the groaning table.

Debs was given the place of honor at the head of the table and I was singled out for a plate by his side. The one long table was not sufficient to accommodate all the guests and so two smaller tables were hastily cornered and spread. The eyes of Debs fairly gleamed when they beheld the tempting dishes, all of which had been provided and brought by the several women. In the center of the table sat a huge cake covered with white icing with Debs' name written on the top in red icing. When the time came to cut the cake a vote was taken as to who should have the honor of inserting the first knife. That was the only office to which I was ever elected.

It has always appeared to me that one of the most wearying social customs is the house party, where a solemn effort is made to abandon formalities so that the guests may unlimber and enjoy themselves, which they seldom appear to do. I have seldom attended such a party when I was not bored to death, if from nothing else than gazing upon the rigid figures and forms occupying uncomfortable chairs and one and all having the most miserable time in their zealous ambition to be sociable and formless.

There is the usual small change talk among the

women, who gradually separate themselves from their men, yet who never seem to be able to ease their minds or eyes from the corner in which their husbands sit and smoke and bore each other into insomnia or insanity with the most banal and trivial conversation.

I am merely trying to draw a comparison between the usual home gathering and the delightful special occasion that Dr. Stephens and her kind and thoughtful husband sponsored for their friends with Debs as the guest of honor. I shall always want to remember that pleasant spring evening.

### **Debs Is Reprimanded.**

About 10 o'clock Debs announced that he must leave, and looking in my direction, summoned me to follow suit. He went the rounds, shaking the hand and bidding goodnight to every person in the room and paying to each some gracious compliment. I can see him now, bending over an old woman nearing 80, who with her husband was soon to leave Terre Haute to spend their autumnal days on a Kansas farm. Taking the hand of the old lady and smiling into her face, he said: "Why, you look as young as you did 20 years ago!"

"Now, lookahere, Gene, don't you go saying soft things like that, for you know I am old enough to be your mother."

"Why, you are not old. There is not a wrinkle in your face and not a gray hair in your head," he said, looking at her whitened locks.

"Well, I will be 82 next July—or is it 83, Henry?"

looking at her husband, who nodded assent to both figures.

“Well, when you get out there on the farm and celebrate your 100th anniversary I will come out and see you and we will do a Virginia Reel and have a regular ‘Turkey in the Straw’ night.”

How beautiful all that was to me—the little word play, which might be indulged with spiritual profit by any husband toward the woman who has weathered his storms, plus her own. How many seams in faces and white hairs in heads might be spared if lover-husband but told his sweetheart-wife how empty life would be without her. Would it? I am sure I don’t know. But it would be sweet if couples thought so.

Having said our goodbys, we took our leave, Gene and I, and strolled toward the car line, homeward bound. Theodore and his wife remained. Perhaps I have neglected to say that Mrs. Katherine Debs, Gene’s wife, was in Indianapolis, consulting a nerve specialist for herself. As we approached his house on Eighth street a soft spring rain was falling and Terre Haute was asleep. At Debs’ invitation, I accompanied him to his library and we sat and smoked and chatted until midnight, when I departed for the old St. Nicholas around the corner.

Before I went to bed that night I took from my trunk an old print of Christ which Debs had pinned to the wall of his cell in Atlanta, and as I looked upon the soft features of the young Hebrew, my thoughts wandered around the corner to the elder Gentile, and I wondered why some peo-

ple drew distinctions between youth and age and races.

### Supper Table Talk.

One afternoon, during the absence of his wife in Indianapolis, Debs invited me to come over and take supper with him. As I entered by the side door, I saw him in the kitchen wearing a long apron. He was frying pork chops. The table was neatly set in the kitchen, and I volunteered assistance, which he declined, as usual. I threatened to wash and wipe the dishes after supper, but my suggestion was met with vehement negation, and I was sent to his library to await his arrival. During supper we talked of many things, and I recall asking him if he had ever met Jack London and what he thought of London's books. No, he had not met London.

"I think London wrote some mighty fine books, and I specially liked his 'Call of the Wild,' 'The Iron Heel' and 'The Sea Wolf.' London was unquestionably a genius, an artist of the first water. There was nothing surprising to me in the fact that Jack endorsed the war. His was a romantic mind, an adventuresome spirit, and that combination cannot be expected to sink itself into the grooves of logic and practicability." Debs referred to the great strike of the miners which was at that time in progress, and he remarked that they were beaten at the start.

"The miners are pitting their stomachs against the operators' bank vaults, and we know in advance who will win. The miners will lose. Still, the strike is a good rehearsal for the final battle against capi-

talism. During the war they permitted themselves to be delivered to the shambles by their leaders, who were incompetent to lead and who must have known in advance that the promises given to them by Wall Street would not be fulfilled. It was a cowardly act for President John L. Lewis to obey the injunction issued by Federal Judge Anderson at Indianapolis. That was the time when Lewis should have shown his real leadership of the miners. A labor leader who is afraid of going to jail is unfit to hold a position of trust. Alexander Howat, of the Kansas miners, who defied Governor Allen's Industrial Court, is of the stuff of which true labor leaders are made. I admire and respect him.

"You can go right down the line. The three greatest labor unions in the country have been beaten to a standstill. All within the period of two years. First it was the railroad men; second, the steel workers, ably led by Foster and starved into submission; and now the miners. If these three great industrial unions would only combine, what a tremendous force they would be for social and industrial betterment in this country!"

#### **His Opinion of Foster.**

What did he think of Foster as a labor leader?

"I have a high respect and admiration for him, both as a man and as a militant fighter for industrial and social democracy. Foster sees far, but I fear he may come to grief in one way or another if he continues to champion the radical labor cause."

As I write these words I am astonished by the prophecy of Debs' observations about Foster. In Au-

gust, 1922, Foster had an engagement to speak in Denver on labor. He was arrested in his hotel before the meeting and taken in an automobile across the Wyoming State line, where a county sheriff met the automobile that carried his kidnappers. Foster was turned over to this official, who drove him along a railroad track in the desert and then ordered him to board a train for the East, warning him never again to put his foot in that territory for the purpose of addressing working men.

Debs addressed the following letter to Foster after reading of the occurrence:

Elmhurst, Ill.  
August 26, 1922.

William Z. Foster,  
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Comrade Foster: If I were not confined to a sanitarium under treatment I would at once be with you and tender my services in any way in my power. The miserable wretches in Colorado and Wyoming, especially the capitalist hireling who masquerades as Governor of the former state, who so brutally manhandled you in the name of law and order, have sown dragons' teeth from which will spring in due time the warriors of the revolution, who will sweep the corrupt system, of which they are the servile lackeys, from the face of the earth.

You are to be congratulated, after all, upon the infamous outrages perpetrated upon you in the name of capitalist law and justice, for in these outrages, committed by their liveried hirelings, is revealed the fear of their thieving and brutal masters, and this is the highest compliment they could possibly pay you. They know you cannot be bought, bribed or bullied, so they set their dogs

at your heels to drive you off their reservation.

I need not sympathize with you nor bid you be strong, for you have the strength to stand and withstand, and you need no sympathy, and all I have to say is that when I have recovered my strength sufficiently to take up my work again I shall be with you shoulder to shoulder in your stand for the working class and industrial freedom, and meanwhile I am,

Yours fraternally,

EUGENE V. DEBS.

There is expressed in this letter a militant spirit, to be sure, and I anticipate that there may be some who, after reading this far, will conclude that Debs blows both hot and cold. To those who think so I would say that Debs is militant. His life speaks for as much. Consider his imprisonment in 1919, and his former one in 1894. Great leaders of unpopular causes do not go to prison for remaining at home toasting their toes before a comfortable fire. Debs loves life and liberty with a passion so hot and holy that he would give his own life gladly for a cause that might have a reasonable chance of securing justice and happiness for mankind. His pulse is quickened at the thought of those who would do likewise. There is no inconsistency here. Faith that is flabby is only sympathy, but faith that is strong invites the faithful to battle for their ideal on the ramparts of freedom.

“Do you think a great industrial alliance could produce a vital social change?” I asked.

“An intelligent social revolution can never occur in any country until the people are educated, and when they are educated they do not need a revolu-



tion. Spiritual expansion is quite as important as material progress. The capitalists progress materially. Do they show any signs of spirituality?"

### Robert G. Ingersoll.

Debs soon joined me in the library after supper, and he spoke about Robert G. Ingersoll. He had known Ingersoll personally, and earlier in my visit I was permitted to read many letters from the great orator and agnostic. Debs said that America had produced only one truly great orator, and he named Ingersoll.

"I have heard every one in my time, from Wendell Phillips to Woodrow Wilson, and there was not one to compare with the natural grace and beauty of the Colonel. He was Prince Charming himself—handsome, buoyant in every movement and gesture. He was grace itself, and to hear him even in ordinary conversation was to be spellbound by the most exquisite and eloquent vocabulary to which men ever listened."

Debs thought that Ingersoll was not happy toward the end of his life; that his agnosticism was not sufficient to fill a gap that yearned for something more; that there were some questions about life that needed to be answered and for which Ingersoll could find no answers with his skepticism.

"Ingersoll set himself to an energetic task in downing many superstitions, dogmas and theologies that needed to be relegated to the barren past, and when he had accomplished all he could he had nothing to turn to for spiritual consolation. A man needs just that when the years fasten themselves upon him, and

without it he is lonely, indeed. It is easy enough for a young man to doubt and disbelieve, but it is hard for an old man who has seen it all and contemplates the setting sun."

There was something very pathetic in these observations to me, for it made me feel that a man like Ingersoll, who was so vigorous in his youth and middle age in what he believed, or rather disbelieved, should have a reservoir of faith of some sort toward which his thirsting spirit might turn for drink in his later years. What is it in age that old men fear? What shadows lurk in the path to frighten them as they approach the mists? I did not like these thoughts about Ingersoll and I wondered. I knew that in Debs there was much of the mystic, for I had seen that tendency manifested in several situations, and further evidence appears in numerous pieces of his writing. Had he ever been a disbeliever?

"Oh, yes, a strong one," he admitted.

### A Sermon on "Hell."

"When I was a boy about 15 years old I went to hear a sermon one Sunday morning in old St. Joseph's Catholic Church here, and the priest delivered an address on 'Hell.' I shall never forget it as long as I live. He pictured a thousand demons and devils with horns and bristling tails, clutching pitchforks, steeped in brimstone, and threatening to consume all who did not accept the interpretation of Christianity as given by the priest. I left that church with rich and royal hatred of the priest as a person, and a loathing for the church as an institution, and I vowed that I would never go inside a church again.

"Ingersoll came into my life when I was a young man and my association with him, which became intimate as the years rolled by, reinforced the mental stimulus that I had gained through my reading of Tom Paine and other agnostics."

I knew that he did not harbor that hatred against clergymen now, for he counted among his friends many ministers of the gospel. It was interesting, too, to hear him tell me that his mother had been a Roman Catholic, while his father was a Protestant. In their early married years they attended their respective churches and as the first three children were born the father yielded to the mother's faith and they were baptized as Roman Catholics. Just before Eugene was born the veil of orthodoxy was lifted from the eyes of both parents and they simultaneously yielded their respective creeds. Debs was the first child born under the star of religious freedom fixed in the family firmament by his mother and father. He was never baptized.

#### **Ingersoll on the Labor Question.**

Debs thought that Ingersoll was a deeply religious man who was popularly misunderstood in his day as an Antichrist. Someone told me in New York that Ingersoll was invited by friends of the Chicago Anarchists to defend them in their trial in 1888, but that he declined. My informant laid the declination to what he called Ingersoll's cowardice. I asked Debs about this and he said he did not know if Ingersoll had been requested to come into the Haymarket case, but that he was sympathetic to their cause and favored their acquittal.

I reminded Debs that William Dean Howells had done as much by writing at least one letter to the press denouncing the trial as a frame-up. I knew that Ingersoll was friendly to labor and that whenever an opportunity occurred he put himself on record for justice for the workingman. In point of proof, I offer a letter by Ingersoll found among my papers:

"I am compelled to say that I cannot be with you tonight, but I am a firm believer in the eight-hour movement. Unless the labor-saving machinery helps the laborer by reducing the hours of labor it might as well be destroyed. Reasonable labor is a blessing and is the mother of health and plenty. Excessive toil deforms both body and soul.

"The organized few have lived long enough on the toil of the unorganized. In this country there is the perpetual opportunity for peaceful revolution. The workers are in the majority. They can elect legislators, judges and executives.

"Let the workingmen unite, let them use the power they have and use it wisely for the benefit of all. They are in the majority, and in this country there is the right of peaceful revolution. All real grievances can be redressed by legal means."

Col. Ingersoll faithfully and sincerely believed as much in his day when organized labor had yet to come to grips with organized capital. He did not live to see that peaceful victories legally won by labor were disputed with violence by capital in industries and invalidated through their own legal political machinery.

**About Clarence Darrow.**

Debs talked about Clarence Darrow, the Chicago attorney who was one of counsel for him when he was on trial in connection with the activities of the American Railway Union in 1893.

“Darrow is one of the most pessimistic men I ever knew. He has few beliefs in the feasibility of movements for human betterment, and but slight faith in the ability of mankind to rise above animal stature. He is skeptical of nearly every social philosophy. He does not think that man is capable of rising much beyond his present mental and spiritual demonstration.”

Perhaps it would be just to Darrow to summon him to our council and permit him to speak through his own pen about what he thinks of life and its manifestations. It will enable us to see with more clarity Debs' opinion about Darrow and his pessimism. The paragraphs that are quoted are taken from Darrow's writings:

“Luck and chance are the chief of all factors that really affect man. From birth to death the human machine is called on to make endless adjustments. A child is born and starts down the road of life. He starts blindly and, for the most part, travels the whole way in the mists and clouds. On his pathway he meets an infinite number of other pilgrims going blindly like himself. From the beginning to the end, all about him and in front of him are snares and pitfalls. His brain and nervous system are filled with emotions and desires which lure him here and there. Temptations are beckoning and passions urging him. He has no guide to show the way and no compass to direct his course. He knows that

the journey will bring him to disaster in the end. He does not know the time or the nature of the last catastrophe he shall meet. Every step is taken in doubt and pain and fear. His friends and companions, through accident or disease, drop around him day by day. He cannot go back or halt or wait. He must go forward to the bitter end.

"I am convinced that man is not a creature of infinite possibilities. I am by no means sure that he has not run his race and reached, if not passed, the zenith of his power. I have no idea that every evil can be cured; that all trouble can be banished; that every maladjustment can be corrected or that the millennium can be reached now and here or any time or anywhere. I am not even convinced that the race can substantially improve. Perhaps here and there society can be made to run a little more smoothly; perhaps some of the chief frictions incident to life may be avoided; perhaps we can develop a little higher social order; perhaps we may get rid of some of the cruelty incident to social organization. But how?"

Debs thought that Darrow was an unhappy philosopher who had crowded many events into his life; who had, in fact, seen it all, and had no more illusions to be broken.

"Withal," said Debs, "he is the most generous of men and a fine friend. No man or corporation could buy Clarence Darrow. He came to Atlanta to see me one hot day, paid his own expense, and went straight to Washington from Atlanta to consult with Attorney General Palmer, Secretary of War Baker and Secretary Tumulty in my behalf. Darrow has written some beautiful essays—I recall a little book by him entitled 'Persian Pearls.'"

I remembered the book, too, when Debs mentioned it, particularly for its essays on Walt Whitman and Leo Tolstoi—two eloquent prose tributes to a great American and a great Russian. Debs vouchsafed that Darrow had lost, or sacrificed, many opportunities to make a large fortune for himself by serving as attorney in labor cases.

### **A Fair Fighter and His Adversary.**

In all the years that Debs has been a prominent figure in public life he has fought his battles without malice and without taking mean and unfair advantage of his opponent or political adversary. Quite casually he spoke of one incident where it would have been possible for him to have used a shadowy incident in the private life of a judge who presided over a certain case in which Debs was interested, but he refrained from doing so despite the encouragement that was offered from sides that were sympathetic to the labor cause.

The incident of which he spoke related to a well known judge, now deceased, who, Debs said, alienated the affections of the wife of a merchant in the community in which the judge lived and who was his friend. The judge subsequently married her. Debs said that the judge's private life, so far as the moral code is concerned, would scarcely meet with the approval of conventional people, whose standard of ethics the judge was believed to represent and of whose moral canons he was supposed to approve.

"When they came to me with the story I refused to use it against him," said Debs. "I hated the social system for which he was a spokesman and I abominated

his concept of industrial and economic justice. I fought him in his own court on that issue and I refused to step down from that plane to muckrake his private life in order to win an advantage in a public cause.

"I do not know how many times people have come to me with stories about the private lives of my political opponents, and I presume I have received a thousand letters from zealous correspondents eager to serve the cause, even at the hazard of possibly ruining a home and besmirching the names of good women and their children. It seems to me that a man's and a woman's private life belong peculiarly to them."

### **Debs and His Poetic Admirers.**

Upon another occasion we spoke about the poetry and poets of the American radical movement, and the name of Edwin Markham was mentioned. I do not recall that Debs said he had ever met Markham, but he did mention that he read Markham's most famous poem, "The Man With the Hoe," when it was first published some 25 or 30 years ago.

"I think I first saw that poem in some eastern magazine and I had not read the first two stanzas when I leaped from my chair and called my wife, exclaiming that here was the poem of the twentieth century. I read it aloud to Kate and we both agreed that Markham had given voice to the soul of the revolutionary cause and the struggle for emancipation and human betterment. I sat right down and wrote to the author, then an unknown and struggling school teacher in California. I commended him highly and told him that his poem was the work of a genius. It seems to



me that later I wrote an article praising the poet and his poem.

"I have always been partial to poets and they have not been slow to sense it, for during the years that I was in Atlanta I received bushels of poems and I really felt sorry for the job imposed upon Theodore and Mrs. Curry to acknowledge these thousand and more tributes." Once a week Debs sent to Theodore in Terre Haute the mail which came to him at the prison, every piece of which was acknowledged by his brother or by Mrs. Mabel Dunlap Curry, a close personal friend of Debs for many years and a tireless and devoted assistant to Theodore during the years of Debs' incarceration.

I told Debs that I could not take a view as kindly toward the Debsean poets as he took, since, as editor of a weekly Socialist magazine, it became an added duty of mine to read bales of poetic tributes to him, many of which were trite and sentimental. When I remarked this to Debs I added that I hoped he would at least be considerate enough to behave himself in the future and keep out of jail, for I positively refused to read any more poems inscribed to him. Debs puffed his pipe and laughed.

"You needn't laugh," I cried. "Theodore told me just the other day that he felt like shooting a poet on sight, and what he said about your lofty opinions of some of the bad poetry that was written about you doesn't speak very eloquently for your literary judgment."

"I know perfectly well that when you two rascals get your scheming heads together you say all manner of things behind my back that you wouldn't dare

say to my face. I have told Theodore that if he didn't behave himself and treat me with proper respect I would feed his hide to the wolves, which are still prowling around Indiana prairies. As for you, well—" he trailed off with mock scorn, "I was telling you about Markham. Many years afterward there was a young poet who sprang up here in Terre Haute by the name of Max Ehrman. I knew his family very well and I became interested in Max, who attached himself to me in a very friendly way. I read a few of his poems and thought they were expressive of the idealism of our cause. I sent some of them to Markham, who by this time was famous in New York, and asked him if he wouldn't write a letter to Ehrman by way of encouragement.

"Very often a young writer and artist derives infinitely more encouragement from being commended by an elder pen and brush than by all the words of praise proffered by their friends. By return mail Markham sent the poems back and accompanying them was a short letter saying he was too busy to read Max's stuff. Well, do you know, that made me so damn mad that I took time while in the midst of a campaign to sit down and write Markham, not so briefly, what I thought of him? I reminded him that a score of years before I had been one of the first to praise his 'Man With the Hoe.'"

### **The Battle of the Poets.**

I was amused by the Markham incident and told Debs of the visit of Markham to Horace Traubel while the latter was spending several months at the home of

Rose Karsner and myself in the summer of 1919, just before his death.

Markham had come with Dr. Percy Stickney Grant, pastor of the Church of the Ascension, New York. They talked with Whitman's biographer for quite some while when all of a sudden I, who at that moment was writing in one of the back rooms, heard loud conversation between Markham and Traubel. Traubel had been warned against excitement, which invariably brought on acute palpitation of his heart. I went into the front room and saw Markham in a half sitting posture on the edge of his chair and Traubel, who was lying on a couch near the bookcase, raised on one elbow, and gesticulating violently in Markham's direction. From all appearances it seemed to be a battle of the poets, with Dr. Grant sitting by caressing his hands in a manner becoming a minister.

Debs laughed and was eager to know the cause of such unseemly conduct.

"Well, from what I could make out of it," I told him, "Markham said that 'it was generally known' that Walt Whitman used to sneak out of his cottage in Camden, like a bad boy, and confab with a clairvoyant around the corner, from whom, Markham alleged, Whitman derived spiritual inspiration and much prophecy. I entered the room at the moment when Traubel, his eyes aflame, denied it in tones that could be heard by a pilot on the East River that flowed past our door. 'Markham, that's a God damn lie! Whoever told you that is a liar! They have been peddling—the cheap mongers have been peddling such nonsense about Whitman ever since we put him in

the ground. I was with Whitman daily for 19 years, and I know that clairvoyant stuff is a libelous invention.'

"Markham was surprised to find a dying man so much alive, and he instantly backed up, and with proper and gentler wording befitting the occasion, took his departure with Dr. Grant. That evening I talked about Markham with Traubel, who called Markham a 'One Poem Poet.'"

Debs enjoyed the reminiscence of the colloquy. He said he didn't know of anything that Markham had written quite as well as "The Man With the Hoe."

"Still," said Debs, "while I do not believe he was ever a Socialist, Markham has been spiritually allied with the labor struggle and in his own way he has used his gifts for our general good."

Laughingly I reminded Debs that his erstwhile poet friend, Max Ehrman, was said to have expressed the opinion during the World War that the penitentiary was the place for Debs in view of his pacifist attitude.

### **Explains Physical Condition.**

I made it a point to go to Debs by 9 o'clock every morning and I recall one day in the early part of April when he greeted me by saying, "I don't feel very brilliant this morning and I don't know whether we can get through with our task today." The task, as I have said, consisted of a three-hour talk about his life in Atlanta prison, a chapter of which I wrote each afternoon following our conversation, during which he dictated much of the material. His color was gray and the skin was drawn around his mouth. His lips were almost

colorless. His eyes were bright, too bright I thought to indicate anything but a weakened physical condition, and as he sat in his ample leather chair he looked like a broken warrior who had experienced many of the tearless miseries of life and much, Oh, very much, of its love and laughter.

I suggested that we postpone our talk until afternoon and said that then maybe he would feel better.

"No, let's go ahead, for every day counts now." He seemed depressed and I felt that the necessity of getting out the prison articles was palling on him.

"I had a very bad night last night," he said. "I had two shocks, and this morning I am not good for anything."

He explained the shocks by saying that he would be lying in bed for hours wide awake with every nerve aching for sleep and relaxation, and his mind appealing for surcease from thought, when all of a sudden he would experience a wrench that would shake his entire frame; his arms would fly apart, as though he had been galvanized by an electric bolt. Immediately following this shock his heart would thump so loudly that a person in the same room could hear it, and the beating would be so heavy as to shake the bed on which he lay. He told me that there were many times in Atlanta when he had those shocks and for many months the prison physicians gave him digitalis to assist his heart.

### **Refused to Die in Jail.**

"In those spells I could have died at any moment had I yielded to the invitation extended to me," he

said. "But I was determined not to die in the penitentiary and I would not have succumbed there had I served my full ten-year sentence. Naturally, I am anxious to live now. All I need is time to rest and relax and then I shall be ready for the fray and the war-dance."

He forced a smile and I wondered if he really believed that he would again be the physical man capable of expending the tremendous energy that his activities had hitherto called forth in the forty years of his battle for liberty and justice. I doubted his ability to come back in the physical sense, and yet his spirit was adamant, tireless, never to be bent and broken by discouragement or disappointment, for he had hitched his hope to a star and the luminary that he had chosen was not a fragile one that falls out of the sky on a summer night.

We talked the material necessary for the ninth article and at noon we were through. As usual, Debs asked me if there was anything I needed, assuring me that he would procure anything necessary for my comfort. He never forgot to be solicitous of my personal welfare during the entire month of my stay by his side. There was never anything I needed that he could give me, in a material and physical sense, and yet I was not surprised to find on the table in my room, when I got there, a bag of fruit or a few cigars, a bar of chocolate or a pipe and some tobacco.

Before I left him this day, which was a Monday, he said that we would go to a moving picture show

one night that week and reminded me that Tom Mix, Bill Hart and Charlie Chaplin were competing for Terre Haute's favor. "But we will not go tonight for I would be miserable company for you," he said. I left him sitting in his chair rocking gently, and I felt that the weary expression upon his face was not due entirely to his physical weariness, but had as much to do with the hectic flush upon the countenance of the world whose hatreds filled him with pity, but never despair. Debs is most always tense, but never so much as when he is alone with his thoughts in the quiet of his chamber.

#### **Declares an "Illegal Holiday."**

For several days Debs had been saying that he would declare an illegal holiday. We had been working steadily on the prison articles and had sandwiched in a five thousand word article of his Atlanta experiences for the Century Magazine. This article was a recapitulation of the material we were writing for the syndicate. I was beginning to feel the strain of the work, and I, too, mentioned once or twice that we should loaf a day to refresh our spirits and replenish our reservoirs of ideas.

On Monday morning, April 4, I went as usual to breakfast at the railroad depot restaurant, a short walk from the hotel where I was staying. When I returned to my room to gather up my note paper preparatory to going to Debs' house around the corner, I espied several cigars on my table which I knew I had not put there and which led me to believe that Debs had been around during my absence. I hastened to his home and found him sitting in his

dining room reading some old letters taken from a buffet drawer. Without his telling me, I sensed that the illegal holiday was on. I told him that I had found the cigars, and he laughingly remarked, "I have found that it is part of my job to keep you supplied with smokes, and I had a letter from Ryan Walker the other day saying that if I fed you chocolate peppermints you could be almost human. Well, maybe we'll find the peppermints today."

I found a chair and lighted one of the cigars. He said he would not join me in smoking. He continued to rummage in the drawer, which he now brought over to the table, reading sentences from old letters which he told me were written by him to his wife. Some of them dated back twenty years and several he read in full. I especially remember one or two he wrote on their wedding anniversary, and as he read the beautiful tribute to his lovely and loving companion I imagined that I had never before heard such eloquent and poetic tribute from husband to wife. I recall one letter written by him to Mrs. Debs, I think in 1904, from a particular room in a special hotel in Pittsburg, the same room and the same hotel in which they had spent their bridal night.

Debs reminded his wife of the spiritual connection between the physical setting of his letter and their union. I recall one passage in the letter, which read about as follows:

"You have grown more beautiful and more precious to me with each passing year. It is many years ago since first we came under the roof of this old hotel as bride and groom and it seems to me that from that day to this we have enjoyed together



an unbroken honeymoon. When I took you as my wife I did not lose you as my friend and comrade, and the years that trail behind us have borne beautiful testimony to the sweetness and sanctity of our love. I think of you every moment and inclose you in my arms this night in spirit."

At the time Debs wrote this letter to his wife in Terre Haute he was in the midst of his second campaign for President of the United States.

Debs took his hat and we left the house to celebrate the holiday which we had arbitrarily invited. He was as frisky as a youngster and struck a pace down Ninth street that I could scarcely keep up with. He said he wanted to "pay a few social calls" to some of his friends in the city's business heart—friends whom he had not seen since his return. In fact, I understood that this day was the first one that he had allowed himself to renew friendly ties rudely severed by his imprisonment. There were many complaints reaching his ears accusing him of isolating himself between his home and his office. Well, this day at least the hermit was at large and I was to see with my own eyes a city's heart extended to her best beloved citizen.

#### **Buys Candy for Chambermaid.**

Midway in a block on Ninth street he stopped suddenly and bolted into a corner drugstore, where he met the druggist midway, called him by his first name and slapped his palm with a resounding whack. A large, red-faced, gray-haired, weather-beaten old man, who looked as though he might have been a railroad worker many years, was picking a cheap

smoke out of a can on the cigar counter. Debs' eye lighted upon him and in a twinkling he had whirled around on his heel and had his long arms around the bulky form of the old workman, inquiring about his wife and family and especially about a particular son whom the old gentleman had named Eugene Victor.

Evidently, they had known each other many years and I was convinced that the red-faced man was an "old rail." A young man came in to buy a bar of soap and Debs turned around to see if he knew him. Not being able to claim an acquaintance there, he invited the latest customer up to the cigar counter and bought cigars for all of us, including the proprietor.

"Now," said Debs to the druggist, "I want a good box of chocolates for a good friend." He was shown one and he balanced it up and down in his hand as though he knew anything about the quality of the goods by the weight of the package. "Well, this feels like a good one," he said, handing over the price. Goodbys were said and before I knew where Debs was going, we were recovering our tracks on Ninth street back to the St. Nicholas Hotel, where he presented the candy to an elderly woman who did double service as housekeeper and chambermaid. She was as shy about taking the sweets as though she were sixteen.

"She has done me many kindnesses," said Debs, "by putting me on your trail when I can't find you in the room."

### Stopped in Former Saloon.

Down Ninth street again we went. We stopped in what had once been a saloon in the middle of the block. The white-haired proprietor was standing behind the bar polishing sterile beer spigots as a matter of habit. The bar was now supporting odds and ends of confections such as chewing gum, chocolate bars and tea biscuits; a container of pretzels could be seen. Only these and the proprietor were reminders of a day in our national life now dimmed by the doubtful virtues of prohibition. I was amused when Debs asked the veteran bartender "how was business," and I laughed outright when the latter answered with a grunt.

"Well," said Debs, "maybe better days are ahead," and they both laughed.

After recalling some quaint little episode in their boyhood in Terre Haute, Debs extended his hand across the Sahara bar, and the proprietor took it affectionately and without a word.

Our next stop was the Postoffice on Seventh street near Main. Debs walked up to the stamp window and extended his hand under the wicket window to the astonished clerk, who did not identify the visitor until he had gone. Debs went in to shake hands with the postmaster in his private office. The official was a prepossessing young man, thoroughly business-like and exuding an air of good-natured importance.

The postmaster rose from his chair the moment Debs entered the room, greeting him with a smile, saying, "Mr. Debs, I am mighty glad you are back with us."

“Thank you, thank you; that is very kind. I merely came to express my gratitude for the many kind favors you showed me and mine during the years of my absence. Mrs. Debs has told me all about your kindnesses to her and your frequent inquiries as to my welfare.”

They were facing each other, man to man. A young man, who doubtless had political aspirations and who at least had touched one rung of the ladder by virtue of his postmastership, was looking into the eyes of a veteran of political battles, yet had never harbored the slightest ambition for public office. Debs acknowledged to the man before him that they were on different political sides, “but,” said Debs, “we can shake hands and look each other in the eye as friends.”

### **Fraternizing With Friends.**

We hurried around a corridor, Debs seeking the mailing room, where he knew a woman employe whom he had known since she was a little girl living in his neighborhood and whose mother and father he had known intimately. Their meeting was affectionate, and as I stood by Debs told me that the young woman had written many letters to influential persons protesting against his imprisonment. It was the first time that this woman had seen Debs since the night of his return from Atlanta, when she was able to get but a fleeting glimpse of him as he stood in a moving truck heading a gigantic parade of thirty thousand people who came to the depot in the night to welcome him home. Tears welled in the woman's eyes as she clasped his hand, and at

the parting they kissed with the simple tenderness of a father and his daughter. Debs promised to pay her a visit and partake of a meal which he said must contain a dish of her delicious potato salad.

We next went into the book and stationery store of Louis D. Smith, on Main street, near Seventh. A young woman clerk evidently knew Debs had entered, but she was shy in evincing her interest in him which was obvious by her expression. Debs inquired the whereabouts of Mr. Smith and was told that he had not been in the store for many a month because of blindness. It appears that Mr. Smith had sold his business anyway, and Debs remarked that Mr. Smith "doesn't need his eyes to see, for he sees more with his interior vision than most people see with their two eyes."

Up the street we went, bound for I knew not where and striking a lively pace until Debs collided with the bulky form of the former sheriff of Vigo County, whom he greeted in a manner quite unconventional for hurrying pedestrians to see on a busy street at the rush hour. They chatted for five minutes, recalling various town characters, episodes and events which had gathered historical importance in the annals of Terre Haute. As we left the ex-sheriff, Debs remarked that the man had been a personal friend of the late United States Senator Voorhees and had never failed to take the side of miners when they went on strike.

He dashed into a hat store with the speed of one aiming to catch the last train to an important point, and I wondered about all this hurry when he had

made it a point that we were to have a quiet and restful holiday. Still, I managed to keep up, but not without cautioning him that it was risky to take country cuts across business streets in busy hours.

The clerk in the hat store announced that the proprietor, whoever he was, would not be in until late in the afternoon, but assured the visitor he would tell his employer of Debs' call. Debs remarked that the clerk had been very gracious to him, which he was.

### **Main Street's Biggest Store.**

On the opposite side of the street was Herz's department store, now managed by the son of the founder, whom Debs knew in those early and forming years of the city's life. As he strode through the aisles busy clerks followed him with their eyes, while idle ones ceased chatting and looked after him. Up one lane and down another he went with me by his side in search of Mr. Herz, whom he wanted to meet and express his gratitude for a letter of kindness that the merchant had written to him in prison. By the elevator we saw a bronze relief of the founder, and Debs remarked that the sculptor was an artist, for he had achieved an excellent likeness. We stepped into the elevator with the information that Mr. Herz's office was on the second floor, but the elevator boy, knowing Debs by sight, ran us up to the top and down again to the basement and up again before permitting us to alight at the second. I was sure this was unconscious on the boy's part, and when he reached both the upper and lower floors he reversed his lever like an animated automaton, not taking his eyes from Debs. As we stepped out of the car the boy slyly reached for Debs'

hand, saying, "Thanks, Mr. Debs, for riding in my car."

After a moment's delay Mr. Herz came out of his private office and greeted Debs affably. He had the manner of a busy man and there was about him an air of one accustomed to handling large affairs in a small town. It seems at the moment of Debs' visit Mr. Herz was dealing with a New York salesman; still, he did not begrudge the time spent in chatting with his noted visitor.

At the elevator Debs met the widow of the founder and inquired of her health.

"It isn't the same since my husband's death," said Mrs. Herz simply and somewhat sadly. "It just isn't the same any more." And her eyes swept over the spacious floor, in a corner of which Mr. and Mrs. Herz could have put their little drygoods and notion business when first they started. Debs reminded her that now she had a big store. "Yes, but what's the store? It isn't the same any more," she repeated. One did not have to be told that this widow had been a joint creator of this business, which now consumed half a block—the leading store in a city that had ambitions to be the metropolis of the state. In the widow's plaint there was a trace of sadness and possibly a vain wish for the return of those days, their little notion store, a fond and loving husband, a very small town built on a prairie, and a longing that such things might last forever without intruding ambitions such as young business men and growing cities invite.

### **Merchants and Men.**

As we left the store Debs remarked: "There are many merchants who are excellent as human beings."

Not all of them are seeking only profits. A man can be both plutocrat and humane, both employer and friend. I never have made myself dislike any man merely because he had money and a great business. I do not in the least dislike business men, for I have known many who have been estimable gentlemen with attributes that were worthy and admirable. Our fight—the fight of Socialists—is against the business men's system, which often victimizes them quite as much as it enslaves their employes, robbing them not only of the product of their labor, but reducing them in body and spirit to material cogs that have lost their initiative to think about anything beyond their physical existence. If it can be said that property is theft, it should also be admitted that a job is a bribe. The wage system will some day be abolished with the profit system, for one is dependent upon the other and neither can exist without its ally.

“There are some business men who have seen as much and who welcome a change in the interest of a higher humanity and a nobler civilization. Take, for example, the late Mr. Gable of Altoona. He owned a great department store. No man of my personal acquaintance would have welcomed more heartily than he a fundamental social change, and no man was kinder and more uniformly considerate of the well being of his employes than Mr. Gable. He had the heart of a woman, the soul of a poet and the generosity of a benefactor, which he was indeed. David, never forget that there are many plutes born into their circumstances—many of them—just as working men are born into their environments of unequal opportunity.



Neither should be held to personal account for the strange avenues and alleys into which life has flung them without the consent of either. We can and shall humanize the present social order by supplanting Socialism for capitalism. It may be a long process, punctuated here and there by violence provoked by capitalists unwilling to relinquish their stolen goods. Violence begets violence and a social system such as ours, that is maintained by force and violence, may be destroyed by force and violence. I hope the change may be accomplished by peaceful means. I have always urged it that way. I believe in political action as a means of meeting the present demands for social change.

“Even if I believed in force as the only efficacious method, which I do not believe, I would not be so silly as to advocate it before an untrained army of gunless working men. We must try the humaner way to settle social questions. Many working men have no conscious social concepts. A spiritual sun has not yet risen in the mind of countless thousands—millions, maybe. Of what avail to such as those who do not yet glimpse the rudimentaries of broad social needs of humanity would be a knowledge of the technique of force and violence, save the opportunity given them to club each other to death while their real enemy—the capitalist system—finished the job of annihilation? A person who advocates the doctrine of force and violence will usually run to cover at the first sight of a policeman’s club. He is asking others to do what he would be afraid to do himself. He is an enemy of the working class.”

### What Socialism Could Do.

"But suppose the capitalists would refuse to capitulate, surrender, after the working class had won control of the government through political action?" I asked, anxious to draw Debs out on this point, yet anticipating the answer he would make.

"Well, if the people were to elect a Socialist government to supersede the present capitalist one that would of itself serve notice in November on the plutocrats that the following March they would be expected to vacate their high and mighty premises. That would give them four months' time in which to make up their minds that their rent, interest and profit system had come to a close and would be substituted by a system of production for use in accordance with social needs. In that co-operative and democratic industrial system every man would have enough work to guarantee him an equal social opportunity with every other man. Poverty would automatically disappear for the reason that there would be work for all willing hands and earnest minds, and an assurance that none would want for food, clothing and shelter. A man is not poor who has the assurance of enough to eat, garments to clothe him and his family and a comfortable home in which to raise his children.

"Four months' time is by far longer than the capitalists give their employes when they do not need them any more. Men lose their jobs now at a moment's notice. The loss of a job does not imply that the worker is incompetent or untrustworthy.

"With the Socialist government securely in power

it might be necessary for it to maintain for a little while an army sufficient to guarantee its security against counter-revolution or civil war by the capitalists and their friends. Lincoln was opposed to slavery. The South was in favor of it. A majority of the people elected Lincoln, thereby serving notice on the slave-holders that they must surrender their human chattels to freedom. They refused all overtures to settle that social question amicably and without bloodshed. Lincoln was in favor of compensating the slave-holders for the loss of their slaves. They were obdurate, and in their blind hatred of that phase of human decency they committed an overt act against the Republican Government by firing upon Fort Sumter.

“By that act they served notice on Lincoln that they preferred to settle the slave question by force and violence, and President Lincoln used his political power to command the army and navy of the United States to suppress the insurrection. Some historians say that in the early stages of the civil war Lincoln intended only to suppress the rebellion and leave the slave question to be arbitrated.

“In any case, the army and navy of the constitutional government were used to free the slaves, and the South was defeated.

“I presume that if the capitalist class refused to obey the mandate of the people and had elected a Socialist government to serve them, and denied the right of that government to re-arrange the economic system of society, and provoked the People’s Government to arms, the question might be referred back

to the people by referendum, and if they should order their government to call them to arms, then the capitalist system would have to be wiped out on the battlefields.

“Personally, I should dislike to be in a position where I would be obliged to order any man to war. I hate war and I loathe warriors.”

### **Those We Meet on Main Street.**

In McKeen's National Bank, on Main street, Debs met Mr. McKeen, the president and son of the founder, whom he had known and with whom he had deposited many thousands of dollars of the funds of the American Railway Union. Mr. McKeen was short and slightly corpulent, a good-natured man, graying at the temples, with a genial air about him. The greetings exchanged, Debs passed out of the banker's office, which was separated from the main floor by a mahogany railing. He met several depositors who were leaning over high desks waiting or counting money. As we emerged from the bank Debs met a local judge with a large, black hat shading one eye and having a general appearance and demeanor that might suggest most any vocation except the judiciary. The judge was chatting with a business man by the name of Kester, whose father, aged 89, “often talks about you,” according to the son's greeting to Debs. It was now noon and many people were passing this important corner in the business heart, some nodding to Debs and others just looking and passing on. We turned away and crossed the street, where Debs stopped to turn

around and look at an old man whittling a stick with a dull pocket knife.

"Hello, there, how are you?" called Debs, extending his right hand and clasping his left over the man's palm. "Aren't you Mr. Hogan?" asked Debs. The old man's astonished countenance denied it and Debs rejoined: "Well, if you ever see him, you'll know what you look like. I'm glad to meet you anyway—my name is Debs"—and away we went only to be recalled by the man who was not Mr. Hogan.

"Hey, come back here," he hailed. "I am too old to be gayed by you, but I want you to tell me where 'Gene Debs is and how he's getting along." The old man's eyes were beginning to reveal the subways of his emotion as he looked into the eyes of Debs.

"I am Debs, my friend, and I am first rate; feel as frisky as a panther this morning. How are you?" Tears broke into the man's eyes, and I could see his lips twitching under his shaggy gray mustache.

"Just an old 'rail,' 'Gene, and thinkin' about you all the years you were behind the bars. Damn glad to see you. You're looking not so good. Well, take care of yourself—so long"—came the old man's words painfully as though he wanted to hurry away. Debs clasped his hand affectionately and looked long into his eyes before turning. We walked up the street. I looked back and saw the old railroader put his handkerchief into his pocket and pull out the stick he had been whittling.

We passed through the imposing columns of the Citizens' Trust and Savings Company, where Debs met President Woods and other officers of the bank. Mr.

Woods is a tall man of athletic stature, prematurely gray and a ruddy complexion. (Western American business men are so breezy and full of purpose.) He greeted Debs with a hearty handshake and a cheerful word and said that Terre Haute was proud to have him as her leading citizen, adding that no prison could ever besmirch his character in the estimation of his neighbors.

"Thank you, thank you, Mr. Woods, that is very flattering, and, coming from you, I consider it a high compliment."

Debs turned and was introduced to the vice president, and then Mr. Woods insisted that we make a tour of the building, which had been erected during Debs' imprisonment. Just before we entered the bank Debs remarked to me that the building was new and anticipated Mr. Woods' probable desire to escort us through. "But we haven't got time to tour buildings today."

Still, we soon found ourselves passing through brass covered doors with shining knobs, Debs admiring it all, or at least so pretending, and passing on to an elevator that took us to the roof. This was the premier skyscraper of Terre Haute, and no wonder the banker was proud of it, for it was a monument to his acumen and enterprise, inasmuch as he said his directors were at first fearful of the undertaking. It is something for a man who began life as a clerk in a drygoods store to become a banker and build a skyscraper, and his satisfaction over his accomplishment beamed in his face.

And on the roof Debs was at once interested as his eyes beheld Terre Haute below. He remarked that it

was the first time that he had ever had a birdseye view of his native city. "I have seen my home town in patches, but never all at once." He looked over the landscapes and far below, some 15 stories, the arteries of a growing city were quivering with the pressure of trade. Debs identified old landmarks within reach of his eye.

"There," he said, pointing to a frame mansion standing back from the street, "is the house built by Usher, who was Attorney General in Lincoln's cabinet, and over there stands the original homestead of Demas Deming." Mr. Deming had just recently been gathered to the dust, leaving an estate said to be worth many millions. The leading hotel bore his name. I heard it commented in Terre Haute that Mr. Deming was a shrewd business man, whose reputation was built chiefly upon his ability to see a bargain and strike it while it was hot.

### **The Spirit of Mr. Fairbanks.**

Once more in the street, we passed the office of the Terre Haute Tribune, owned by Terre Haute's leading financier and business man, Crawford Fairbanks. Debs observed that Mr. Fairbanks owned the Opera House, the newspaper, the Terre Haute House, was interested in the street car company, had holdings in the inter-urban line to Indianapolis, was a director of several banks and corporations, and once owned one of the biggest breweries in Terre Haute until the prohibition law put it out of commission. Debs said Mr. Fairbanks was in many ways a citizen personally interested in the welfare of his city and was not one whose chief aim was to make money in it. Witness the Emmeline

Fairbanks Public Library, given to the city as a memorial to his mother. There seems to be a poetic strain in some men who can paint their rainbows with grand strokes upon the canvas of commerce and finance and who, unlike the pathetic little squeaks that climb into those romantic realms, do not whimper when Chance blows all their dreams away.

"Many years ago he invited my wife and me to take a ride with him behind a fine horse. I admired the horse and carriage, and Mr. Fairbanks at once said that I might have both if I wanted them. Of course I declined the gift and, to my amazement, the next morning his hostler drove up to the door with the very same horse and carriage and said: 'Mr. Fairbanks told me to leave this.'"

Debs said he returned the gift with thanks, adding that Fairbanks was just that kind of a man, once he took a liking to a person.

While I was in Terre Haute the daily papers were discussing a recent gift from Mr. Fairbanks to the city, which consisted of a large strip of land running along the bank of the Wabash River, including the former site of his expansive breweries, now to be converted into a parkway known as the Paul Dresser Drive. This was to be a memorial to the song writer, who wrote his most popular ballad, "On the Banks of the Wabash Far Away." All who have read "Twelve Men" know that Paul Dresser was Theodore Dreiser's brother and that the novelist and playwright had a part in writing "On the Banks," which the State of Indiana and the city of Terre Haute have adopted as their official song.



### **Gaining Recruits for Our Holiday.**

We strolled to the bakery shop of Phil Reinbold, an old friend of Debs and one-time president of the Central Labor Union. After greeting Phil's wife in the store, Debs strode back into the bakery, where he found his old friend in white pants and undershirt and his arms covered to their pits with dough. In his excitement Phil forgot that his hands were covered with that material, which in the future would be doughnuts, and clasped Debs around the waist, leaving two doughy hands on his coat tails as an imprint of his affection. Reinbold owned an automobile of many doubtful parts, and he needed no persuasion to declare an illegal holiday for himself and join us in an afternoon jamboree. Mrs. Reinbold soon got wind of the plot and I am sure she was on the verge of closing up the shop and calling it a day herself. I don't know why it is, but so often in my rambles with Debs I have discovered that wherever he goes people want to declare a holiday. I remarked to him once that in spite of his reputation as a labor leader he actually inspires loafing. Witness the celerity with which Reinbold quit his task and sent his assistant home for the afternoon.

It was agreed that Reinbold would meet us with his car at 12:30 at Debs' home. We strode up Ohio street and Debs pointed to a low, two-story brick building of ancient design in which had once been the office of Tom Harper, a lawyer of local renown, a town character who was both generous and witty and well liked.

"Tom Harper was one of the most interesting

men I ever knew," said Debs. "Before he died he had a lucrative practice, and he could have had a bigger one had he cared less for sociability. I suppose some might call him a rounder, or a wag. He was a brilliant man and the husband of Ida Husted Harper, biographer of Susan B. Anthony. In the course of his law work Tom had considerable dealings with policemen, and it was said they didn't hit it off well together. Now there was an old policeman who died here and he was well known and liked. His friends wanted to give him an elaborate funeral and they went around taking up a collection for flowers. It was known that Tom Harper would give to any cause, good or bad, so of course a solicitor went to him. He was eulogizing the dead policeman to Harper when Tom suddenly asked, 'Did you say you want a dollar to help bury a policeman? Well, here are five—bury that many while you are at it.'"

We passed St. Joseph's Church and Parochial School, where as a boy of 15, Debs said he had heard a sermon on "Hell," which for many years caused him to disbelieve in God and eternal life. Those old, dark gray buildings were interesting to me, for I had heard Theodore Dreiser tell of his schooldays in Terre Haute spent in this very building, the same where his brother Paul went to school.

Debs pointed to the City Hall on Fourth street—a dilapidated old rookery that should have been torn down long ago. We lingered but a moment, Debs remarking that it was in that building where he had served as city clerk while a young man and at a

period when he thought he might like to scale the political ladder. I heard it said on every hand in Terre Haute that Debs could have claimed any office within the gift of the people had his politics only been conventional and a standard brand.

We were walking toward the abandoned Red Light district, Debs pointing to a corner at Fourth street saying it was the site of the Green Tree Hotel, where James Buchanan stopped when he was making the first "swing around the circle" in his candidacy for President. That was in 1856. And Debs said that the political term "swing around the circle" for presidential candidates began with Buchanan.

#### **Buster Clark's Bailiwick.**

We were on Third street, two or three blocks north of Main, and at the corner stood the former realm of Buster Clark, now a deposed and exiled king of the Red Light district. Debs had spoken about Buster and mentioned the fact that the former owner of a chain of houses of ill-fame had been among his fellow-convicts in Atlanta Prison.

"Buster Clark and I spent our lives here in Terre Haute, but we never met until we sat at the same table as convicts in Atlanta Prison. Of course I knew about him here in the days of his reign as king of the Red Light, for it was quite natural that news about him or his subjects should get into the newspapers now and then. I know that off and on I made some speeches explaining the causes of the Red Light district, which are due chiefly to poverty of those entrapped in the vicious circle. Before I met Buster I had heard much about him and I re-

member hearing it said that the 'king' conducted his nefarious business in as honest a manner as was possible under the circumstances. For example, I have heard it said that Buster would never permit any girl to enter the Red Light district who had not had previous experience in the ways of the life. Many instances were cited showing that he had sent girls out of the Red Light and back to their homes when he discovered that they were merely the victims of some first false step. Also it has been said that Buster would not tolerate that most loathesome of all human specie known as the pimp and panderer—the human biped who lives upon the illicit earnings of some hapless girl. They say that Buster collided many times in physical combat with these vicious parasites and threw them bodily out of his houses.

"Naturally, I am holding no brief nor offering any apologies for the business followed for many years by 'King Buster,' but after seeing him at close range in Atlanta and knowing the kind of man he really is, I rather think that Buster Clark was as much the victim of chance—which means heredity and environment—as were many of those unfortunate girls who came to be his subjects and made money for him. They say at one time he was enormously rich and controlled half a dozen houses in the Tenderloin. You know Terre Haute used to be the interior Barbary Coast, and I have seen the Red Light district here grow like a cancer from a few isolated houses to whole areas, both north and south of the Wabash River."

### The Fall of a "King."

I asked Debs how "King Buster" came to be thrown from his castle.

"Well, you know the Red Light district here was closed up at the time the reform wave swept the country and many of the denizens and habitués went to peddling dope, and in other illicit ways found means to make a living. Buster was generous and was known to help those who had helped him, but he was an implacable enemy to others and it is said that he never let up on a man once he took a dislike to him. King as he was, he demanded loyalty from his courtiers, members of his staff and his subjects. If that loyalty were paid with due homage and obeisance, the person paying it had a friend for life, or at least as long as Buster reigned. Now, of course, vice and politics went hand in hand in Terre Haute as elsewhere, and for many years Buster carried the Tenderloin vote in his vest pocket. He was expected to deliver it, signed and sealed, at the proper time and for the proper candidate, which he did. But since politics is an artificial profession, politicians are expected to be fickle and as volatile as smoke before a wind. I do not know the full account of the difficulty he had with the politicians, but I understand there came an occasion when it was necessary for them to dispute his power in the Red Light. Kinglike, Buster felt that he could hold his own against the best, or rather the worst of them. There came a showdown and Buster was whipped. Then, not satisfied that they had deposed him politically to the extent of breaking his power, they sought to punish him for disputing theirs. They knew that Buster was

generous and they sent one of their stool-pigeons to borrow \$5 on the pretext that he needed it badly, and instructed the stool-pigeon to buy dope with the money obtained from Buster Clark. It seems that the plot was successful, for Buster Clark and his wife were indicted by a Federal grand jury at Indianapolis on the charge of conspiring to violate the Harrison anti-narcotic law by giving a man money to purchase dope. Of course the witness against Buster was the stool-pigeon to whom he had given money and who immediately purchased dope with it for the purpose of framing Clark, who had to admit that he had given the man money. He was sentenced to serve five years at Atlanta and his wife was sent to Jefferson City prison for a shorter term."

What a story! Still, I had heard of and written its equal many times in the years that I was a police reporter. After all it was nothing more than one of those sad bits of American life that come to the fore now and then out of the welter of the underworld.

### **The Remains of an "Empire."**

Now Debs and I were standing in what had been the throne room of King Buster's court, from which he had ruled like a Nero over his scarlet castles, from whose shuttered windows the strains of the fiddlers, keeping syncopated time to the ribald voices of the painted demimonde, could be heard. Far against the wall stood what had once been an electric piano, the panels of which were shattered as if by the spiked boot of a night-rider.

The keyboard was smashed as if with a mallet. Why is it, when a king falls, his kingdom goes into

decay? Yet here it was! Look at that mahogany bar, for instance, once highly polished like the top of a piano, now scarred and stained like a piece of piling on a dirty river front. Look at that brass fender, once polished to a golden glow, now dented and sagging at both ends. The red burlap on the wall was torn in large patches and one or two objects of doubtful art were hanging dejectedly from their soiled gilded frames. In one corner a battered table, with one leg tied to the top with a rope, was supporting a game of dominoes engaging the attention of two men, from whose faces might be pieced together a story as fascinating as one that could be told by a post office blotter.

Behind the bar where once had stood imposing fixtures of gorgeous carving, backed by beveled mirrors that reflected an imposing array of expensive liquors, now hung a forlorn half-dozen shelves, supporting empty cigar boxes and dirty bottles of soft drinks. Where once a corps of white-coated and spotless-aproned gentry had served their eager and avid patrons, now stood a lone sentinel with pimply face and pasty hair, with nothing to serve but cheap cigars and soft drinks to hard-fisted and rough-necked men who smoked pipes and yearned in vain for heavier beverage. It was all so sad. This was indeed the end of an empire. It was less than that. It was the sub-cellar of hell with the ceiling blown off, and the sun pouring in, revealing only the ghastly completeness of King Buster's ruin. I wondered what had become of the girls who once sat at those now neglected tables, and

where were the hands that had beaten that piano, now a remnant and a relic of a better though, paradoxically, sadder day. Where were those white-aproned bartenders? Were they waiting in dyspeptic restaurants, or had they fallen heir to brighter or darker prospects?

### **Frayed Ends of Humanity.**

Debs stepped gayly up to the bar and leaned over it, peering into the blotched face of the man behind it. "Where is Buster this morning?" he asked.

"Well, Mr. Clark doesn't come in often these days, and I think you will find him out in the country," he answered. The man seemed to know that he was talking to Debs, for he grew familiar at once and pretty soon their heads were almost touching as they discussed the odds and ends of unimportant matters such as "business" and the weather, which was wet and dreary enough at that time of the year.

Pretty soon men came pouring in to Buster Clark's place as though they had been summoned by some secret current, and to this day I cannot say how they discovered that Debs was in King Buster's Emporium. I know that in the old days of Red Lights, news, good or bad, traveled with the speed of radio, but I had supposed the reformers had cut all those mysterious wires of communication that used to summon emissaries and inmates to cellar or garret, to parlor or boudoir, according to the tidings. Anyway, here they were, possibly a dozen, black and white and yellow, buzzing up to the bar like blue flies, but wanting nothing more than to shake the hand of Debs. One young colored lad, evidently a worker



on the river docks, sidled up and touched his arm and assured him that in the 1920 presidential campaign he had voted for Debs. An old, bleary-eyed veteran, who carried in his face the seams of a thousand debauches, extended his gnarled hand and welcomed Debs back "among us." An Irishman and a German, burying their ancient racial grievance, flanked him with cordial greeting.

Debs treated the crowd to cigars and we departed with their raucous goodbys ringing in our ears.

As we walked up the street Debs commented about the kindness, loyalty, goodwill and friendship of these people of the underworld, and said, "I love them as they are, and for what they might become if given a chance. They are the people who make no pretenses and who are what they appear to be. They are the people shunned and discarded by Respectability, which at best is but a shabby cloak to conceal ignorance, cant and hypocrisy. I know the psychology of the people of the underworld. They are as true and as good as society permits them to be. They are the rebels against form and conformity, and if their lives are cast in shadowy byways it is no fault of theirs. Those men whom we have just left are hated and despised by society, yet they are made in the mould of the world's workers, and unless I am very much mistaken they were the sort of people who first chose to follow Christ. I know the goody-goody people don't believe it. Somehow they have stuck to the idea that Christ was a university graduate and wore white robes to distinguish himself from his tattered followers in the same way

as our conventional ministers of the gospel bedeck themselves with frock coats so that they will not be mistaken for anybody else. Church worshippers would do well to remember this verse:

“If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar;

For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen,

How can he love God, whom he hath not seen? ”

### **Surrounded by Children.**

Turning into Fourth street, a group of children playing in front of a school caught his eye and we went across the street. Debs was soon surrounded by the little folk, chatting with them and picking them up one after another. The principal was looking out of a window, and seeing Debs, invited him to come in, meet the teachers and inspect the school building, which he did. We passed from room to room, Debs admiring it all and expressing his appreciation to the principal. We entered a large room where perhaps fifty children were seated at long tables, having their noonday luncheon, which we understood was furnished by the school. At one of the far tables a boy who appeared to be older than the others turned around, and seeing Debs, sprang to his feet; that acted as a signal for the other children to do likewise. I have been with Debs in many public gatherings and have often seen people rise in his presence. But never have I witnessed such beautiful token of children's respect for a person whom they knew to be honest and true as these little ones evinced toward Debs, their neighbor. It was

beautiful and impressive, and as we walked out Debs remarked that they were the children of Terre Haute's workers, mostly miners.

"I never feel so humble as when I find myself in the presence of a child who pays me respect and evinces a deferential attitude. Every man and woman should strive to make himself worthy of the love and devotion that children are so eager to pay them."

#### **A Tailor Becomes Eloquent.**

We passed a little tailor shop and the proprietor leaped from his table upon which he had been sitting cross-legged and hailed Debs. We went back, and for ten minutes Debs and the tailor were deadlocked in friendly debate about Terre Haute and his prison experiences. The tailor mentioned that the Governor of Indiana, Warren T. McCray, had made an address to an American Legion post in which the Governor regretted that Debs had his residence in that state.

Debs smiled.

"Well," said the tailor, "the United States may deny you your citizenship, but they can't deny that you are a citizen of Terre Haute and of Indiana, and it doesn't make any difference to us what the people in Washington may say about you. We who have lived here with you all these years know you a damn sight better than the people down in Washington who sent you to prison and who would keep you there but for the hell of a row that we made out here in Indiana."

The tailor was becoming eloquent and with his long shears poised in one hand and a needle in the

other, it looked for a moment as if he would deliver a perilous welcome home address.

"Mr. Debs," he said, "many a good man has been in this shop, but you're the best one that ever came through that door and I shall never forget the shock that went through my body when first you shook my hand some years ago in this very town before you became as famous as you are now."

In close contact with this sort of voluble adulation, Debs is always confused, and not on quite easy terms with himself. Although he has experienced that kind of thing all his life—public and private worship—he never quite learned how to take it to himself, and he invariably makes some extraneous remark that switches his admirer's conversation into a more general channel.

The tailor's shop was in a battered little shanty that could have told at least fifty years' history in Terre Haute. Debs reminded the tailor, who kept sucking his walrus mustache between his toothless gums, that the little shack in which they now stood had been a candy store in the days when he went to school, just down the street—the school we had just left.

### At the Scene of His Birth.

Across the street, Debs pointed to a vacant lot between two shabby, weather-beaten frame dwellings and said that was the site of the cottage where he was born. We looked into a great hole that once had been the cellar of his birthplace, and I saw the eyes of the tall man beside me grow moist. The house had been torn down while he was

in prison. One or two of the old floor beams were flung across the earth, and scattered here and there were a few bricks from what had probably been the chimney.

It was astonishing to me that there had not been sufficient public interest in Terre Haute to maintain Debs' birthplace, and I remarked to him about it.

"No, there is nothing astonishing about that," he said. "Most of these people here care nothing about me in the sense that you imply, and many of them are quite convinced that I will be dead in earnest when my light goes out. There were some here who wanted to preserve it, but they had no money, and those who had the money didn't care anything about it. People out here care nothing about such sentimental things as preserving a man's birthplace; it requires a subtle understanding of cosmic possibilities to conjure in the mind an interest in that sort of thing."

"But what of the years to come," I cried, "when America may want to honor your memory and public-spirited citizens will be casting around for the scenes of your childhood and the houses where you lived? Suppose there were no Lincoln shrine? Or Whitman? Or Poe?"

"You are looking too far ahead, David. Your affection has demolished your reason."

"But you surely know that you will live after your clay is gone?"

"Yes, I am sure of that—sure because I believe in immortality. In spiritual consciousness beyond the grave. But if you mean to ask me if I think there

will be any popular sentiment for me after my clay is put away, I can only answer you candidly by saying that I do not care; I never give that a single thought. I am interested in living the fullest life that I know how to live on this earth; and I do that with moderate success because I am constantly aware that the joy that fills my cup to the brim comes from my belief that I am of some social use in the world and have contributed to the best of my ability to the happiness of my fellow-men. I will allow my adversaries the right to think that my method, or my technique, is wrong, but I will challenge any living soul to dispute the integrity of my heart and the honesty of my purpose, of our purposes. It is sufficient satisfaction to me to believe that my method is right, and to pursue my cause to the end, no matter how bitter, and refusing to be swerved or turned back by bitter opposition or fulsome praise."

We turned into Sycamore street, and Carl Stahl, his neighbor, drew up to the curb in an electric sedan. He hailed Debs, and we got in and rode home. While we sat on Debs' porch, now undergoing repairs, waiting for Phil Reinbold to call for us in his car of many parts, some sparrows hopped across the lawn in the wake of a robin. Debs called them little exploiters, who wait until the robin scents and digs up the grub-worms, and then steals them.

"In that sense the sparrow might be compared to some human beings who live off the toil of the workers and exploit the talents of others. But there are

extenuating circumstances that mitigate for the sparrow's crime."

"You are forever making apologies for people who err; what apology have you to offer for the sparrow that swipes the robin's worm?" I asked.

"Well," he replied, "the automobile is a perfect justification for the sparrow's corruption. Time was when the sparrow on the twig raised his head and, seeing a horse coming down the street, pecked his sleepy mate and said to her, 'Get up, beloved; here comes a nice hot breakfast.' And down they flew to the open pantry in the street, partook of the oats and had enough left to come back for lunch. Now, when the sparrow sees an automobile, he knows there is nothing in it for him—not even a drink of water. The automobile is the sparrow's Nemesis. In the horse he had a fond and faithful provider."

#### **Sensitive to Party Controversies.**

He again protested against the insistent appeals that were being made upon him for statements indorsing different factions of the Socialist movement. "I will not make any statements because I have not the physical strength to defend them once they are made. Moreover, I will not waste what little strength I have in petty quarrels among some of the leaders of these factions. They got into the mess, and they must get out of it without my assistance. They do not realize that I have been shut up in a dungeon for three years and require time to collect my thoughts and gather my strength. Some of them would trample over my body, if in doing so they could elevate themselves to preferred position, but

I shall not permit it." Small wonder that Debs dislikes factional strife. His temperament is essentially that of a poet and dreamer.

Phil Reinbold arrived and we got into his car. The illegal holiday of the afternoon began with a personal visit to Buster Clark and then to Fort Harrison.

As we ran slowly along the roads leading north from Terre Haute, Debs pointed out landmarks familiar to him and commented upon the beauty of the green prairies. He quoted Ingersoll: "The oaks and the elms are more majestic in their affinity with nature than the chimneys of factories and the steeples of churches."

Just ahead of us on the road a man was walking wearily and carrying a heavy grip. Reinbold suggested that he give him a "lift" on his journey. The traveler said he was a miner on strike and was leaving Terre Haute for Crawfordville, a distance of perhaps 50 miles, where he thought he could get some other kind of work. He climbed into the rear seat beside me without bothering to open the door and seemed grateful for the ride. Debs engaged him in conversation and the man said he had resolved not to be beaten in his struggle to live to feed those who were dependent upon him for support. It was apparent that the striker did not know that Debs was riding with him, for he showed surprise when I whispered the fact to him.

"Well, why don't he make himself known?" said the miner.

"There is no occasion for him to introduce himself," I replied quietly. "I merely thought you might like to know that you were riding with him."



"Yes, yes, I am glad," he rejoined. "He's a good feller and a friend of the working man, all right." We rode on and soon we were to turn off the main pike, which our traveler would follow to Crawfordville. Debs gave the man some money and wished him good luck and advised him to join the Socialist party when he "got around to it."

### **In Buster Clark's Retreat.**

Our car swung into a short stone road and pulled up to the house of Buster Clark, the exiled king of the Red Light district. Buster came out to the car and he and Debs fell into an affectionate embrace before the former had alighted. We walked the length of the screened porch and into the living room of the bungalow. Buster Clark stood fully six feet and weighed perhaps 250 pounds. His girth was expansive like that of Chief Justice Taft when he was President. King Buster looked the part that he had played in life. His handshake was weak and flabby like his jaw. Evidently Buster had not wasted any time shaking hands. His derby hat was tilted over one eye. Beads of perspiration stood out upon his red face and ran into little rivulets down his neck, like raindrops against a window pane. His heavy lips, like his ears, were colorless and twisted, and a diamond, as big as a dime, glistened from his silk shirt striped with red and black a quarter of an inch wide. When he took his hat off one could see that his head had done no profound thinking and his hair, parted near the middle, was black and sticky.

The room into which we were ushered was well but severely furnished. There were just chairs without

a psychology, which Debs once said a chair should have. King Buster sat down on a leather couch, ample enough to accommodate four, and one could tell he had been a king by the way he sat, with his legs sprawled, permitting the rim of his stomach to caress the couch between his thighs, and his fat hands, from which diamonds sparkled, resting upon his kneecaps. The day was warm and King Buster wore no coat in his country palace. A pair of gay suspenders were twisted over his shoulders and a yellow belt did auxiliary service.

Buster sighed heavily now and then, while he and Debs discussed their former prison days, and it was apparent that Buster felt keenly his imposed exile.

Suddenly he broke off the conversation and went to the hall to the foot of the steps, where he called to someone who was coming down. There was infinite tenderness in King Buster's voice and for the moment I thought he was speaking to a child, perhaps a crippled child, admonishing it to be careful on every step. I saw him reach out his big arms and assist whoever was coming down over the last few steps. He threw his arm around the shoulders of a little woman, slightly more than half his stature, and led her to a chair in the room. Then Buster suddenly realized that she should be introduced and he tenderly gathered her up into his arms and led her over to Debs, and then to Reinbold and myself, introducing her as his wife. It was evident that Mrs. Clark had suffered in her life like Buster. She spoke in monosyllables, and then only when she was addressed. In a few moments Buster escorted her out of doors and onto the lawn,

where he drew up a chair for her and got a footstool. Later we learned that Mrs. Clark was in the last stages of paresis—that her mind was fast giving way. Physically, she seemed healthy.

Buster reminded Debs how he used to get a Jewish prisoner, who worked in the kitchen, to bring out extra pieces of pie to him and then Buster would take a slab under his coat over to the hospital and share it with Debs. They laughed heartily over this little ruse, Debs explaining that the harsh rules of the prison imposed upon the inmates the necessity to steal and practice underhand methods to show their fellowship toward each other.

"Well, 'Gene," said Buster, "I guess you and I won't have to wear that brakeman's uniform any more." And they both laughed.

The convict's uniform in Atlanta is blue denim.

"Well, Buster, it is all right," said Debs. "We had our ups and downs, but we both preserved our sense of humor."

"Yes, indeed we did, 'Gene," said Buster, swelling up a little.

"Well," said Debs, "I would rather a thousand times stagger to the judgment bar of God Almighty with the habitues of the Red Light district than to appear before St. Peter among the swaggering elements of the Country Club. A man who is conscious that he is a good Christian is often wearing a mask to hide his defects. When I was much younger I used to believe that people had the will to determine the course their lives would take. I have no such illusions any more. I know that I am a creature of circumstances,

and that I have had very little to say about the course my life has taken. It seemed to be laid out for me, and I merely followed in a path already cut. I think that most of us do that. Whether we are what the world calls good or whether we are what it calls bad, speaks very little for our personal virtues or for our individual vices. Buster, you tested the gold in your heart by your good feeling and generosity toward those unhappy men that we left behind the bars."

### **Philosophy of a Realist.**

"'Gene, don't say such things, for I don't deserve them, and in your heart you know it," protested Buster. "My business has been questionable and you would disapprove of it, and you know it; but I conducted it on the level, and I wouldn't stand for any monkey business from those that tried their damndest to get me in the penitentiary long before they succeeded, not because their business was any better than mine, but because they envied my pile and power."

"I know all about that, Buster," said Debs. "Your life was shaped for you and mine for me. Our courses lay in widely different directions, but at the roots I think we are all pretty much alike and I doubt if there is a God so unjust as to hold each and every one of us to strict accountability for our individual imperfections. If the story of Jesus has any meaning at all it is that in the final accounting the so-called sinner will have his day in court the same as the alleged saint. Personally, I hope to find my place among the scorned and shunned outcasts and share their lot as I deserve to, whatever that may be."

"The trouble with you is, 'Gene, you are 2,000,000

years ahead of your time. The world ain't cut out for men like you. Human beings are rotten, corrupt, and that's all there is to it. You believe that people are corrupt through circumstances over which they have little to say. I don't. I made my life and I fought for it at every step and I'd fight for it now all over again, maybe not just the same way, maybe I wouldn't open a 'house' again, but I guess it wouldn't take on a much different color at that."

The two men were now standing in the middle of the floor facing each other, and I shall long remember the striking contrast of their faces. Both of them had a right to claim leadership in the same city; Debs over a spiritual domain, Buster over a sordid material realm fast crumbling into decay. Buster took us through his house and showed us the rooms, knocking his heavy fists against the doors to prove to us that they were solid, and tapping his fingers against the walls to show that they were not made of shoddy materials. With all their furnishings the rooms had a barren, an empty atmosphere, and it gave one the feeling of dying things. We went out into Buster's yard and he showed us the outhouses and electric laundry machine, and the latest devices for successful poultry raising and pointed with pride to his chickens, cooped up like Buster behind a screen and counted as property.

Out of all the gilt and crimson of his former years Buster at last had been able to wrest nothing more from life than two dozen chickens and a little house on the slope of an Indiana hill. He was on parole, and he knew that his enemies were still active should he again attempt to assert his power in the underworld or to remake his broken throne.

### Recalling the Indians.

We started for Fort Harrison and in a few minutes Debs was pointing to the spot on the banks of the Wabash where Zachary Taylor defended the fort against Tecumseh's tribes. The river was on a rampage and the banks were swollen. Far up the stream, around a bend in the woods, we saw the sun sloping over the western horizon, and with memory's eye Debs recalled those distant days when the original Americans rounded that bend in their canoes and lived their peaceful lives until the palefaces, jealous of the land they had, and ambitious to build an artificial world not half so beautiful, drew them into battle after swindling, robbing and lying to them in ways that, by comparison, would prove Ananias a truth-teller and Robin Hood an honest man.

"Think of a race of people," said Debs, "having so much poetry and romance in their lives as the Indians had! It gleamed from their dazzling feathers and blankets. My sympathies have always been with the Indians and I know of no people on earth whose civilization was so criminally outraged as theirs. They called them savages and our histories paint them as barbarians. When the Indians killed two white men it was a massacre, but when white men killed a whole tribe of Indians it was only a battle."

Fort Harrison is now a country club and a short distance away we saw men in white flannel trousers and brilliant sweaters playing golf on ground that is hallowed in American history as one of the scenes where the redskins threw out the sponge to their pale-

faced conquerors and slid back forever into sad obscurity, never more to emerge from their wigwams on the wind-swept prairies, to hunt and trap their game in the wooded wildernesses of the West, or to build their fires on hillsides of freedom and smoke their pipes while blinking at the moon.

We were bound cityward and our illegal holiday was fast drawing to a close. Phil Reinbold, at the steering wheel, was telling Debs of his experiences while campaigning in Terre Haute as the Socialist candidate for Mayor. He told of one meeting where there was no applause, his speech being greeted with uncomfortable silence. Debs burst into laughter, saying: "A speech without applause is like 'white mule' without a kick." (White mule is the name given to bootleg whiskey in Indiana, the distillers guaranteeing that two drinks will kick the drinker into a police station, three into a hospital, and four into his grave.)

Reinbold drew his car up in front of a moving picture theater, where the feature film showed Bill Hart in an imaginary drama of the West. Debs and I entered and Reinbold went back to his bakery. Debs loves the West and the memory of those bygone days of drama. The great outdoors always beckon him, and the life of the plainsman and trapper finds poetic response in him.

We came out of the theater and I left him at the corner of 8th and Main streets. He was going to a doctor, but I saw him run into a group of men who planted their feet around him in a manner that indicated that Debs would not consult a physician that day.

### **Debs and the Communists.**

In the months following his release from prison Debs was much concerned about the strife in the American Socialist movement. It was forced upon him. There was scarcely any harmony to be found in any faction, and while the initial split had come in the fall of 1919, resulting in the foundation of the Communist Party, that organization had sub-divided itself into at least three factions by 1922. The major group was known as the Workers' Party which, it was understood, was the legal expression of the Communist Party which went "underground" after the fashion of radical movements in Russia before the Revolution, since the Communists had been outlawed by the federal and state governments and many of their most prominent members were sent to prison for long terms under "Criminal Syndicalist Laws."

Debs denounced those laws as interfering with the freedom of speech and causing a system of official espionage to be continued even after the war had come to an end. But he also opposed the Communists and scorned "underground" methods which he thought invited espionage and made the business of the agent provocateur a lucrative one.

We often discussed this matter in the quiet of his library and several times before he referred to it in our talks in Atlanta Federal Prison.

"I have been opposed to secret organizations all my life, and I do not mean to change my opinion about them at this late day," he said. "There is no good reason now in this country for an underground movement. All that we have to say we can say overground



and if the people won't listen they certainly won't pay any attention to us if we should adopt the practise of whispering and ducking. I am opposed to it on principle as much as on the impracticality of it."

Even while he was in prison Debs did all he possibly could to effect unity between the factions of the radical labor movement, particularly between the contentious groups of what had been the united Socialist movement.

### **Neither Wanted Amalgamation.**

Upon one of my visits to Atlanta in April, 1920, I telegraphed an interview with Debs to the New York Call on the desirability of unity. Debs requested that I make a plea in his behalf for solidarity of the political forces of the labor movement. I did so, and upon publication of the interview there was some dissatisfaction with Debs' sentiments on the question of unity from both the Socialists and the Communists.

Several moderate Socialists questioned the accuracy of my report. I had written too much about Debs and had quoted him too often to permit a question of the authenticity of the interview. I mailed the questioning letters to Debs with a copy of the paper containing the 'unity interview' which was printed under my signature.

The reply that Debs wrote immediately is interesting and significant for the reason that it permits him to speak for himself on this subject and at the same time shows how much he desired a unified labor and Socialist movement in the United States.

The letter follows in full:

Atlanta, Ga.  
April 30, 1920.

David Karsner,  
2 Beekman Place,  
New York, N. Y.

My Dear David:—

Your communication of the 27th inst. has been received and I lose no time in replying so that we may both be set right in regard to the interview you had with me and your report thereof as it appeared in *The Call* of the 15th inst. First of all let me say to you and through you to the readers of *The Call* and to the comrades and others interested that in all essential particulars your report was correct and as a whole has my unqualified approval, and whatever is wrong with it must be charged wholly to me and not to you. I admit that the statement is incomplete and no doubt lacking in other respects, but the fault is not with your report, for you caught accurately the spirit and purport of what I had to say and transmitted it faithfully to the readers of *The Call*. Due allowance should be made, however, for the circumstances under which the interview was held and the obvious limitations upon a full and free expression of my views.

In the next place, it should be understood that I spoke for myself only; I did not presume to speak for anyone else. I expressed as well as I could under the circumstances my opinion of what confronts us on the eve of the present na-

tional campaign, and the best course to pursue in the interest of our cause, and this I did simply as a private member, and what I said is entitled to that consideration and no more. It may be added that if I had been looking for a nomination a simpler statement, and one subjecting me to less criticism, could have been made.

That my views have encountered opposition was of course expected. No one, not even the wisest among us, could venture to suggest a way of composing existing differences without provoking adverse criticism. For myself, I attach no great importance to my views and opinions upon party matters. I am as apt to be wrong as anyone. I may be entirely wrong now, as I have been many times in the past. It is my purpose only that I hold true and I have no fear of that being questioned.

I have said and I want to repeat that there is no fundamental difference, in my opinion, between the great majority of the rank and file of the three parties;\* no difference that will not yield to sound appeal in the right spirit. Mistakes have been made on all sides, mistakes aggravated by the war hysteria, and with these candidly admitted an understanding is possible that will embrace a vast majority of all the factions that composed the party prior to the separation. It is not too much to say that I personally know most of the members of all these factions, and I know them to be equally loyal and true, and equally eager to serve the cause.

---

\* Debs has reference to the Socialist Party, Communist Party and Communist Labor Party.

That there are obstacles in the way of unity, and serious ones, it were foolish to deny, but I believe they can be overcome, and if not, then at least there can be a truce on the eve of the battle so that we may enter the campaign with a united front and make the most of the greatest opportunity ever presented to us since the day we were organized.

If I understand it correctly the Socialist Party is the only one of the three that has not been outlawed, at least temporarily, and we either have to enter the campaign as the Socialist Party or not at all, and this being true, why not go into the fight with all our forces united and make the issue so clear and luminous that the enemy will have to face it and thus give us the opportunity for propaganda and action in behalf of our cause that we have never had before and may not have again for years to come? The conditions are ripe; the people are ready; the hour is here. It is up to us. How big are we, or how small? Shall we unite and fight the great political battle before us in behalf of the working class, or shall we turn and rend one another, or seek advantage of one another in factional strife, or talk about our difference or our indifference, and thereby betray the cause by allowing the supreme opportunity to pass us by unimproved? Differences there will always be, especially among Socialists, and fortunately so, but wise men profit by their differences and

do not permit themselves to be throttled by them.

For myself, I have no stomach for factional quarreling and I refuse to be consumed in it. If it has to be done others will have to do it. I can fight capitalists but not comrades. It takes all I have in the way of time and strength to face the front and fight the foe. I do not object to fighting among ourselves, if fighting there has to be, but I do insist that we shall be decent and fight clean, and not sink to the level and resort to the methods of ward-heeling politicians.

One remark in my interview seems to have been sadly misconstrued. I did say that it made no difference to us if the Socialist Party was outlawed in all the states, but what I had reference to was our spirit and attitude toward capitalism and the struggle for emancipation. I meant to be understood as saying that we would simply fight with greater energy, enthusiasm and determination than ever before. Some Socialists were discouraged by the unseating of our Socialist members at Albany. Not I. Quite the contrary. That was our greatest political victory. The ruling capitalists now recognize in our movement a menacing force to their corruption and misrule, and they have foolishly set about to sit down upon it. Now watch them—and us, if we are not as foolish as they.

Some other Socialists were inclined to renounce political action after the Albany experience. Not I. The unseating of those five

Socialists has shaken the whole country. They are talking about it in Main and California, and down here in Georgia, and it is all in our favor.

We have lost and won; they have won and lost!

More than ever, if that be possible, do I believe in political action—not in vote chasing or office seeking, but in political propaganda and action, and there is a vast difference between them.

The Socialist Party is primarily a political party. It is more than that, but it is certainly all of that or it is nothing at all and should disband. If I did not believe, and believe thoroughly, in political action as one of the essential means of waging the class struggle, I would not be in the Socialist Party, not a minute. I can understand those who lay entire emphasis on industrial action and I can cooperate with them in all harmony. I see no necessity for friction or misunderstanding. What I object to is the pretense of political action to screen hostility or indifference to it. If all are either for or against it in real earnest we shall have no trouble in adjusting ourselves accordingly.

The political appeals, if rightly made and properly supported, can be made most potent and effective in the promotion of our cause and for obvious reasons, I think, this is especially true here in the United States. To secure the maximum of results we should go into politics our whole length and with our full strength; we

should have a sound platform and a complete ticket, and we should fight each battle along clean and uncompromising lines.

The coming convention in New York will be the most important yet held. The Socialists here in Atlanta join in hearty greetings and good wishes. We have neither advice nor suggestion. We simply trust the delegates may be strong and stand firm; clear sighted and avoid compromise. In this hour we need as never before faith of granite in our cause—the supreme cause of mankind. We need the sublime faith the cause inspires in us and in each other, and the enthusiasm that leaps from the soul of a warrior like a divine flame, and all we need to fear is that we may shirk some share of our duty and responsibility.

There can be no doubt regarding the temper and attitude of the forward looking American people toward our movement. All the powers of capitalism are exhausted in vain to misrepresent it. Hundreds of thousands are today sympathetic who but yesterday were hostile. They know in spite of all the deceit and falsehood made to serve against our cause that we stand for real democracy and self-government and the essential rights and liberties of the people. And this year, if we but give them the chance, they will rally to our standard, and I am fully persuaded that if we lay aside all differences of the past, as far as may be, buckle on our armor and plunge into the struggle with all our might,

heedless of all else, touching shoulders all along the battle line, when the smoke has cleared away and we emerge from the conflict we shall be so welded together, so completely one in solidarity and sympathy and understanding that there will be little inclination to part company and reestablish a divided and discordant household.

In closing allow me to say that you are at liberty, of course, to publish this letter or to use it wholly or in part in any way you may see fit. For your great kindness in the recent past and for your many loving favors these many years I thank you with all my heart, and with love and greeting, I am.

Yours always,

Eugene V. Debs.

### **Election Returns Show Discord.**

The foregoing letter was one of the most important documents that Debs issued from prison to the members of his party, but sadly enough they did not heed it. The national convention of the Socialists was held in New York in May, 1920, and the Socialists, for reasons which to them seemed wise and sufficient, declined to invite the Communists, many of whom had been Socialists, to send fraternal delegates to the convention. On the other hand, in some sections of the country the Communists let it be known that they would not participate in the Socialist national campaign even if they were invited so to do. In the camp of the extremists Debs was openly flayed for permitting his name to be presented



as the presidential nominee, and they charged the leading members of the Socialist Party with using his name merely to bolster up their cause. In some sections it was said that the Communists printed handbills urging working people to refrain from voting the Socialist ticket, while in others Communist candidates ran against Socialists. The effect of this rancor was seen in the election results, so far as the vote polled for Debs was concerned.

There is no question that Debs felt the thrust, and in the quiet of his prison cell he must have contemplated the long, tempestuous years that he had given to the struggles of the workers, only to realize at last that thousands of the very people in whose cause he had given his all and now turned against him.

In the interest of truth, it must be admitted that the Socialists took the initial technical step in causing the divorce by expelling several thousand members, most of whom were affiliated with the "language federations" or branches containing foreigners, many of whom were considerably influenced by the Russian Revolution and believed that the American Socialist Party should subscribe to the Third International without any reservation or qualification.

It is not in keeping with this narrative to discuss the angles of that controversy, for to do so would entail a book devoted to that purpose. Personally, the authorship of such a work would be repugnant to me. Suffice it to say, Debs, while wholly sympathetic with the Russian Revolution, took the position that the Soviet Government, or what is more to the point, the Communist Party of Russia which is the Soviet

Government, stepped beyond its right in declaring to the Socialist Parties of the world that they must adhere to the Third International and subscribe to the one-time famous, but now discarded, Twenty-One Points, or be considered "yellow," "traitors," and outlawed as Socialists as far as the Moscow government was concerned.

### **Agrees With Party on Russia.**

I had several talks with Debs on this subject and his enthusiasm for the Russian Revolution as a symbol of proletarian zeal and a hope of working-class emancipation never waned nor did he yield his opinion that Moscow was not the oracle of all revolutionary light and wisdom in the world. In that sense Debs was in accord with the position taken by his party with respect to the Third International and therefore found himself viewed with disfavor by the extremists in America whose parties were controlled psychologically and emotionally, if not physically and actually, by the Soviet Government of Russia.

As we sat down to supper one evening in the kitchen, I told Debs that I had seen in the papers that day an item concerning an erstwhile Communist of New York who had been indicted in that city with other Communist leaders under the "Criminal Syndicalist Law." This was the same law under which James Larkin, the renowned Irish agitator, had been convicted with Isaac E. Ferguson, Charles E. Ruthenberg and Benjamin Gitlow, former Socialist Assemblyman of New York. It appears that at the time of his indictment, the unnamed Communist, fled and was not apprehended. Those indicted with him

went to prison. Now the fugitive had returned, evidently chastened and much more temperate in his desire to accomplish the social revolution. Moreover it appears, according to the newspaper dispatch, that he had severed all connection with Communists and promised to be a good citizen, whereupon the court accepted his renunciation and apology and gave him his liberty under parole for a period of five years.

“Just think of that!” exclaimed Debs. “He was one of the fellows who would turn things inside out and upside down and now slinks into the court controlled by his master and begs for mercy, under the plea that he will be good for five years. I would rather a thousand times go to jail and stay there for the rest of my life than be guilty of such an act of vile cowardice. Still, reports have come of other exhibitions of unmanly conduct on the part of some scarlet revolutionists, but few as flagrant as this one.”

### **Condemning Murder of the Czar.**

The matter of the execution by the Bolsheviks of the Czar and his family followed for discussion, and I can see in my mind's eye, as I transcribe these words from my notes, the manner in which Debs compressed his lips, his eyes flashing in protest against what he called “the inexcusable brutality of those responsible for the savage murders.”

“I recoil with horror and shame that such savagery should be committed in the name of Socialist justice that has for its aim and purpose the setting up of the higher standards of human conduct. I can find no extenuating circumstances that would allow me

to take the life of my bitterest enemy and I can find no apology sufficiently convincing to my conscience to permit me to condone a demonstration of that savage nature. They were not satisfied to take the life of Romanoff himself, even if they believed that were necessary, which I doubt, but they went so far as to murder his daughters in the most unspeakable manner, and who knows but what those girls were abused before meeting death. I read several accounts of that dark crime which could only have been rivalled by a herd of hungry hyenas, thirsty for blood and lusting for flesh.

“It does not excuse the crime to argue that the Czar was guilty of a thousand murders of innocent people. We shall not wrest any justice or kindness out of life by emulating the practices of those whose barbaric methods we now denounce.”

#### **If He Were President.**

I asked Debs what he would do if he were President of the United States, and a well organized plot were set afoot to destroy the government that he was attempting to maintain in the interest of the greatest good for the largest number.

“A government that is truly representative of the highest ideals and aspirations of a truly great people will win to its standard the respect and devotion that its principles merit and I am sure that it would not have to rely upon the club and the bayonet to maintain its sovereignty and integrity. A government that is maintained by force and violence is usually destroyed by force and violence. I despise every bully wherever he may be and whatever is his mission.

No matter whether he comes with a club to save my soul or to take my life; he is a bully no less."

I drew Debs' attention back to my inquiry: how would he deal with people who refused to obey the law?

"I would say to them that the people had elected to change their form of government, and that by so doing they had given formal decision that the older forms had failed. For such as those who would refuse to be convinced, there might be mandatory persuasion, and for those who were obviously recalcitrant and involved in mischief to the detriment of the majority, or whose acts were inimicable to the life and liberty and happiness of any individual—they might be restrained in such institutions provided for such people."

"Do you mean that you would put them in a penitentiary?"

"I have gone on record as an enemy of the penitentiary, and when I speak of people who might possibly have to be restrained, I am not thinking of a dungeon or of a guard to watch over them with club in hand and a gun on the wall. I presume there are people who either cannot be or else refuse to be civilized by kindly influences, and it is no wonder, considering the backgrounds of many such unfortunates—backgrounds rooted in poverty, of one kind and another, social ostracism, disease and crime. But the number of people who might have to be treated without their consent is surprisingly low, and if these were to be examined by a pathologist or a psychologist he would discover they were physically or

spiritually sick. If you are asking me if I would lock up a single human being, I answer emphatically no. Such people as would have to be restrained would be attended by male or female nurses and treated as patients in a hospital until such time as their physical or mental ailment were cured, or their perverseness overcome by kindness."

As I write this, I call to mind the words of Art Young, the cartoonist, with whom I dined recently. Mr. Young had met Frank Harris, just returned from the Genoa conference, where he met a few of the personages of the Soviet Government. Young was recalling Harris' words in telling the story of M. Tchicherin, one of the delegates, who was approached at Genoa by a Frenchman, who objected to the murder of the Romanoffs by the Bolsheviki.

"What!" exclaimed Tchicherin. "You complain about the murder of the Romanoffs when tens of thousands of Russian working people were slain under the misrule of the Czar and thousands more lying in fresh graves due to the brutality of the Allies who maintained a blockade against Russia for three years, refusing us food and the necessities of life in exchange for our gold because they didn't like the idea of a revolutionary government in Europe! You dare complain to me about the killing of the Czar's family when thousands of brave Russian soldiers defending the first real working people's revolution in the world were slain by the former generals of the Czar aiding allied imperialism? Don't talk to me about the Romanoffs! I am thinking of the young men and young women of the newborn Russia eager

to lay down their lives for the glory and perpetuity of their revolution. I am thinking of how these will be fed and clothed!"

### **The Moscow Trial.**

About the first of June, 1922, a group of Social Revolutionists were placed on trial in Moscow charged with many crimes against the Soviet Government and among the defendants were a few accused of killing one or two high officials of the Communist regime. It was charged that the Social Revolutionists fostered a plot which resulted in an attempt upon the life of Nikola Lenin. The defendants, it seemed, embraced social and economic ideas that opposed the Communist government, ideas which some of the accused were charged with attempting to put into practice. In sum, the indictment brought against them was freighted with accusations of actual treason as well as heresy. Some of the accused were Socialists with long revolutionary records and several had served terms of exile in Siberia at the hands of the Czar. The belief spread throughout the world among Socialists in various countries that the Social Revolutionaries of Russia were being pilloried and persecuted for their social and economic ideas which were, as I have said, in disharmony with Communist doctrines, rather than for any actual treasonable attempts. Soviet Russia was accused of vengeance upon Socialists who did not happen to believe in Communist tactics as practiced by the Soviet Government—tactics that were criticised as inimicable to the liberty, and indeed the life of many who were not Communists.

The Russian Government, it appears, had agreed at a conference in Berlin, that the Social Revolutionaries would be granted a fair trial and that they would be permitted the benefit of foreign counsel to defend them.

Foreign counsel, headed by Emile Vandervelde, Belgian Socialist, and including Theodore Liebknecht, brother of the martyred Karl, who with Rosa Luxemburg was slain by militarists during the uprising of the Spartacans in Germany in 1919 against the Social Democratic party; there were other lawyers from other countries associated with Vandervelde and Liebknecht. When they crossed the Russian border they were greeted with jeers from mobs who carried placards that were said to be at once threatening and insulting. It was said that the train in which they rode was deliberately detained enroute to Moscow in order that the foreign counsel would be delayed in their mission of justice.

Shortly after the foreign counsellors entered Moscow, they withdrew from the trial of the accused radicals on the ground that they could not be of any service to the defendants in a Communist court. They protested that ordinary rules of legal procedure in behalf of accused persons were ignored and that the defense was not allowed even the elementary right recognized in all courts of law to have their own stenographers. This meant of course—if the report is true—that the transcript of the Socialist trial is a Communist transcript.

Subsequent to Vandervelde's withdrawal, it was reported from Moscow by the Associated Press that



a mob of Communists invaded the courtroom denouncing the defendants, among whom were several women, and threatened their lives in the event their liberty was restored.

The report of this unseemly conduct in a court of law surpassed anything of a similar character that the oldest lawyer could recall. Still, the incident brought vividly to my mind the fact that on numerous occasions during the five months that I sat in a federal courtroom in Chicago as a reporter of the trial of more than 100 members of the Industrial Workers of the World who were accused of some ten thousand crimes against the government and society at large, a brass band in the rotunda of the federal court building played the "Star Spangled Banner" and other patriotic airs for the benefit of the jury who were to decide the fate of those men whose case was on trial during the time—1918—that the United States was leagued with the Allies in war against the German Imperial Government.

Almost immediately following the mob scene, the defendants appealed for a change of venue which was taken under advisement by the Communist tribunal and Communist prosecutor, M. Krylenko, and was denied. Immediately following M. Vandervelde's return to Belgium, he urged the Socialist parties throughout the world to protest at once to the Moscow Government against what he called the farcical trial of the Social Revolutionaries. Newspaper reports of the trial emanating from Moscow freely predicted that the defendants would be found guilty and condemned to death, as indeed was the

result in a number of cases. The death sentence was suspended and they were held as hostages pending the conduct of their party members toward the government.

### **Debs Appeals to Lenin.**

A few weeks before the trial came to its close, Debs received a cablegram from Victor Tchernoff, head of the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Delegation in Berlin. Tchernoff's cable read as follows:

July 24, 1922.

"Eugene V. Debs,  
Terre Haute, Ind.

The case of 22 Russian Social Revolutionaries is coming to an end. All are threatened to be killed. The Bolshevist power wants to accomplish an act of revenge. Please immediately raise the voice of American Socialists in common with protests of all European Socialist parties. Cable to Moscow. Situation is grave and least delay will have irretrievable consequences. For the Russian Socialist Revolutionary delegation.

Tchernoff."

Debs, who was a patient in the Lindlahr Sanitarium at Elmhurst, near Chicago, lost no time in responding to this appeal despite the fact that he had been cautioned by his physicians and nurses that he must have complete rest and relaxation and set his mind at ease from public affairs.

On July 26th, Debs immediately sent this cable:  
"Lenin—Moscow.

"I protest with all civilized people in the name of our common humanity against the execution

of any of the Social Revolutionaries or the unjust denial of their liberty. Soviet Russia can set an example by refusing to follow the practices of worldwide czardom and should uphold the higher standards we seek to erect and profess to observe.

Eugene V. Debs."

Thus the voice of Debs, upon specific invitation from a Russian, Tchernoff, who himself had suffered exile at the hands of the Romanoffs, was raised with that of Anatole France, Romain Rolland, George Brandes, Maxim Gorky, George Lansbury, and many others, in protest against the lynching of opinion and of persons in the one city in the world where millions had hoped and believed that a saner and more tolerant civilization had taken root and would flourish and set an example for others to follow.

I consider that Debs' protest to Lenin was one of the noblest gestures he had ever made in behalf of human decency and social tolerance. The fifty-eight words contained in his message to Moscow seem to me a clarion call to a higher humanity, a loftier civilization and an appeal for the restitution of the nobler amenities which some people in the world are interested in having preserved against the arguments by force and violence and vengeance.

With the publication of Debs' cable to Lenin there appeared in *The New York Call* an expository account of the trial in Moscow and this I mailed to Debs at Elmhurst. On July 30 he wrote to me acknowledging receipt of the papers, adding:

"I have a vigorous protest from a Communist

editor about the cable to Moscow. I shall answer him. If we believe in and inflict capitalist punishment and commit murder in the name of justice, as the capitalists do, we are not a damn bit better than they whose system we condemn as criminal and whose ethics we denounce as barbarous and inhuman.

“The Social Revolutionaries are charged with attempting the assassination of Lenin. If they were not only charged with but actually guilty of attempting to assassinate me instead of Lenin, my attitude would be the same. I would punish them with liberty.”

#### **A Warm Supporter of the Revolution.**

Debs has always been warmly sympathetic to the spiritual aspect of the Russian Revolution and the Soviet Government of Moscow, and it must not be concluded from the references that I have quoted from our conversations about Russia and Russians that he is in any sense hostile toward the wonderful proletarian demonstration being made there and by them. Debs had no critical attitude toward the Russian Revolution until the leaders of the Moscow Government presumed to dictate to and dominate the Socialist parties of the world and to read those revolutionary parties out of the radical movement of the world who refused to accept the Moscow doctrines, charts and programs because they were incompatible with the conditions within the several countries that elected to remain aloof from the Third International.

Debs himself put the matter clearly in a prepared

article published in the New York Call, June 15, 1922, two months after I left Terre Haute:

"It was inevitable," he says "that the advent of the revolutionary change in Russia should effect the Socialist parties of the whole world; but it is likewise true that each nation has its own psychology, and its own peculiar problems that are foreign to the workers of other countries. It does not follow that because Russia seemed to be able to take the shortest cut to revolutionary change that every capitalist or imperialist country in the world is able to accept their identical formula and pattern after it. The workers of a certain country must of necessity adapt themselves to the methods and manners of that country, and out of their own national psychology build toward an international purpose.

"We can give the Russian Revolution and the Soviet government every possible support, morally, spiritually and financially without surrendering our own identity as American Socialists and workers who have social and industrial problems peculiar to our national life and with which the average Russian is wholly unfamiliar."

I am happy to be able to avail myself of Debs' October statement (October 8, 1922) for further proof of how very near his heart is the Russian Revolution:

"I have reserved for the last the infinitely important question of the Russian revolution, to which I have given my enthusiastic allegiance from its inception and to which I now pledge my unqualified support until this stupendous

historic event is triumphantly consummated. It matters not what its mistakes have been, nor what may be charged against it, the Russian revolution, in what it expresses for the Russian people and in what it portends for the oppressed and exploited peoples of all nations, is the greatest, most luminous and far-reaching achievement in the entire sweep of human history.

“Considering the unimaginable opposition, the violent and implacable hostility, the endless plots and conspiracies, the malice, hatred and brutal revenge of the whole capitalist world, including its armed invasions and assaults, that the revolution has encountered, it is the marvel of the ages that it has heroically withstood all attempts to undermine and destroy it and that it is today farther advanced and more certain of achieving its high destiny than at any time since it first shook the capitalist pirates of the world out of their dream of universal empire.

“I have said that Lenin as the incarnation of the Russian revolution is the greatest thing that came out of the world war and that is still my positive conviction.

“The Russian revolution under the leadership of Lenin and Trotzky is the historic beginning of the international revolution that is destined to sweep capitalism and militarism from the face of the earth. The Russian Comrades today are fighting heroically to free, and starving stoically to feed the workers of the whole world. What

they have suffered and endured in their sublime struggle for human liberty and for the progress of the age and the happiness of future generations is beyond human speech and will be chronicled only in the ultimate liberation of mankind from the cruelty and crime of all the centuries in the scroll of time.

“The Soviet Government is the beginning of the self-government of the people throughout the world. It has withstood the combined assaults of all its foes from without and from within and its red flag of freedom still floats in triumph in the face of all the black flags of capitalism and piracy that surround and threaten it.

“The Soviet Government, the lusty child of the revolution, baptized in its precious blood and consecrated to its high ideals, is invincible. It stands and will stand monumental of the revolutionary spirit in which it was born, of the cruel despotism it has conquered and destroyed, of the sacred blood so freely poured out by its valourous defenders, and of the peace, freedom and happiness it is destined to achieve for the whole of mankind.”

#### **A Matter of Philosophic Doubt.**

In the same sense, Debs has a spiritual kinship with members of the Workers' Party, Communist Party and Proletarian Party and any other organization, be its form political, economic or industrial, that has for its goal the abolition of the capitalist system and the inauguration of a society based upon

humane principles and considerations for the lowest member of the human family as well as for the highest. In the foregoing pages I have been aware that I have quoted Debs at some length and several times with respect to his spoken ideas about those newer economic and political organizations that are, for the most part, children of the Socialist movement.

In several of his prepared and published statements and letters, Debs has stated his point of view with respect to them. Perhaps in my talk with him I have been able to catch a "close up" of his views on this subject which has revealed the reason, or at least some angles of his reason, for his objections to their organizations. But his aversion to them is based upon philosophic doubts and not because they appear to be more radical and revolutionary than the Socialist Party. Debs' philosophy includes the spiritual and humanitarian aspect of the labor movement as well as embracing its political and industrial manifestations.

In this connection I think that the matter might possibly be clarified to a large extent were I to again permit him to speak for himself in his own statement (October 8, 1922):

"At this point I wish to pause long enough to say that I have never had any heart for factional warfare. I simply cannot and will not engage in it. I can argue and reason with comrades, but I cannot and will not give way to anger and resort to vituperation over my differences with them. They are as honest as I am and if I cannot agree with them I can let



them alone, and they cannot quarrel with me if I refuse to quarrel with them. . .

“It has not been an easy matter for me to arrive at this conclusion. (His decision to remain with the Socialists as against other factions.) There has been many a heartache in the ordeal that led to it. To see Comrades I know to be equally loyal to the cause, equally faithful and efficient in its service, and whom I have been in the trenches with and love equally well—to see these comrades arrayed against each other in hostile camps seeking to discredit and destroy each other to their common undoing, has been to me a saddening spectacle and has given me pain and regret beyond expression.

“I know many of the members of the Workers’ Party and of the Proletarian Party and I know that in taking the position they have they were actuated by the best of motives and that they are as honest as we are in the choice they made and in their efforts to build up a party to serve the working class in the revolutionary struggle. These comrades I respect as I do our own and I shall treat them accordingly, confident in the belief that in good time the differences that now separate us will be ironed out by the stern logic of events and that we shall be once again united and marching shoulder to shoulder into battle together for the overthrow of capitalism and the emancipation of the workers of the world.”

Candor demands that I say this: I wish it had been possible for me to write this book without any reference to political controversy. I would have preferred it that way, but if I were to be honest with my task I could not do otherwise than to include in these talks what Debs had to say about the political matters that were engaging his mind during the period I was with him in Terre Haute. No book written in the interest of a political controversy can have a wide or lasting appeal. I am one of the last persons having any desire to put out such a narrative. If there is not in the pages of this book much more that is interesting and of permanent value than the comment of approval and disapproval that may arise from Debs' opinions as I have recorded them on controversial matters—I say if there is no more to this narrative than a transient interest then either my reader or myself has failed to grasp the intrinsic significance of Debs as a humanist and idealist.

### **Order In His Own House.**

Nearly all my life I have heard it said, mostly by women, that men, especially men of affairs, are untidy about everything except their person. If that libel has not been challenged before, I would challenge it now and bring to you as evidence a snapshot of the home of Debs. I have never visited in a more orderly one. It seems that nothing, not even a burnt match, ever loses its proper place in the Debs home. I often watched him in his own writing and study room. There are some men of my acquaintance who have made a truce with their wives on the question of housekeeping. The wife is permitted a free hand

to wield the dustbrush (I trust I am not offending those who may choose to abjure the use of that domestic article) in every nook and cranny of the establishment except in her mate's workroom where he is czar over his solitary realm and is allowed the privilege of cluttering the floor with old newspapers, butts of cigars, burnt matches and miscellany of indescribable character.

Yet, in Debs' workroom there is perfect order and arrangement. I was going to say he is almost finicky about order and method. The books and magazines and letters that lay on his desk are placed in neat piles, and I never saw his paper cutter and shears out of their accustomed position. In the drawers of his roll-top desk there are little black pasteboard boxes, which he had made to order to hold his private letters and note books. Debs is never without a note book. It is quite possible that a book about him could be written from their contents. His book cases present the same neat appearance.

I frequently saw him leave his chair while talking with me on some serious topic and pick up a pin or a tiny scrap of paper, or a straw from a broom that had fallen to the floor. When he smokes he carefully puts a cuspidor by the side of his rocker, and if any ashes drop on the carpet they do not remain until morning.

In the attic one observes the same tidy appearance. His newspaper clippings are carefully pasted into scrap books which are labelled.

One day while we were up there rummaging around for something, I asked him to let me see a

certain newspaper clipping that related to a particular incident in his career. Without the least trouble, Debs laid his hand on the scrap book that contained the item. In the same manner he has filed photographs of his friends. There are hundreds of these pictures. It seems that everybody who ever met Debs gave him their photograph beautifully inscribed. Debs is sentimental about them, too, and the day when we were looking at some he told a story about many persons whose pictures were among his collection.

In one of these little black boxes in the drawer of his desk he produced letters from Frederic Auguste Bartholdi, the sculptor who designed the Statute of Liberty in New York harbor. He read me letters from Ingersoll, James Whitcomb Riley, Eugene Field and Wendell Phillips. To call the names of others would be like presenting a small condensed edition of "Who's Who," for the past twenty-five years.

### I Leave Terre Haute.

The day came when I would start east for New York. Our work was finished that morning. Debs invited me to lunch with him and his wife. While we ate he talked rapidly of people and events, and I wish that I might continue this narrative. Perhaps enough has already been recorded.

I recall him commenting about a request that had reached him that day to make a speech somewhere in the west—I think it was Denver. Debs said he hated to refuse and wished his friends would not ask him to speak or make statements or write articles for their

papers until he had fully recovered his strength. There was complaint in his tone of voice.

"Well, dearie," said Mrs. Debs, "suppose no one paid any attention to you at all. Suppose when you came out of prison they all had let you severely alone and had not asked for a speech or a letter. You'd feel mighty blue about that indifference to you, now wouldn't you?"

"You are right," replied Debs at once. "I have no right to complain. Many another man would jump out of his skin, I suppose, for a sixteenth of the public attention that is paid me. I am not ungrateful. I am only tired, very tired.

The half hour before I boarded the train that would bring me home, Debs, his wife and Theodore, his brother, sat with me in the shed of the station. Trains puffed in and out of the depot and Debs would occasionally wave his hand to the engineer and firemen in the cabin of the locomotive. He remarked that the engineer who had brought in the train that carried him home on the last lap of the long journey from Atlanta had died that spring. Debs had known him many years.

There was loud puffing and shrieking and grinding wheels and I knew my month's stay in Terre Haute had come to a close. I did not want to say good-bye. I wanted to board the train and wave my hand from the window—just as though I were coming back again very soon. Still, it couldn't have been that way, for if I had been going on merely an overnight trip, Debs and his wife and brother would not have been less tender in their farewell.

I have reached the end of my part in this story. As I read back over these pages, I see where I might have improved them here and there. But I must be content with their casual and spontaneous note. In the pages that follow Debs speaks with his own pen.

May I ask you, kind reader, you who have been so indulgent with me thus far, to read these letters just as though they were addressed to you. That is the spirit in which Debs wrote them, I am sure, and the only one in which I would feel quite comfortable in accepting them.



**LETTERS FROM LINDLAHR**





## LETTERS FROM LINDLAHR

Terre Haute, Ind., July 12, 1922.

Dear David:—

The Art Review and the Engineer's Journal kindly sent by you have been received and I much appreciate your kindness in sending them. I note with pleasure your article in the Review and I see in it a fine piece of your characteristic portrait work and a rare tribute to Upton Sinclair. I shall take this paper with me on my journey so that I may give it the careful and appreciative reading it so well deserves.

I am just leaving for Chicago where I am to take a course in a nature cure sanitarium which has been highly recommended by others more or less in my condition who have had the benefit of the treatment there. I do not know how long I shall be away, perhaps two or three months, or even more, but from what I have heard through those in whom I have full confidence, I am satisfied that I am going to the right place for repairs and that I shall return with strength renewed and fit for service again.

I have not been able to gather any strength here and I am still physically weak, my nerves worn, and my heart tired. I need the course of treatment the sanitarium prescribes. Everything known to modern curative science is applied there. It is all nature treatment. No drugs are administered. I think you might say in *The Call* that I am taking this course of treatment and that my friends may not expect to hear from me until I leave the sanitarium. This will answer the many inquiries that are made, and

I think it due the Socialists to say this much for their information.

I am intact, as I am sure you know, in spirit. I was never more thoroughly myself in all but the flesh and that can and shall be corrected and in good time I shall be at my post again with strength renewed and with capacity enlarged, or at least unimpaired, to serve the Cause.

How I would love to be in action at this hour! What a situation confronts us and what a call for service! I feel the thrill of it all, but I must be patient for yet awhile and then I shall make up for every hour of inaction enforced upon me.

Katherine and Theodore and Gertrude all join me in love to you.

We send you our loving thoughts each day.

Yours always,

E. V. Debs.

Lindlahr Sanitarium,  
Elmhurst, Ill., July 24, 1922.

My Dear David:

The enclosed flattering editorial may interest you. I send it just as it came. Do not know who sent it. The editor may have feared I might not see it. It is, as you will see by postmark, from Chautauqua, and presumably from a local paper there.<sup>1</sup> You may care to reproduce it in *The Call*. I'd be glad to have you do so. It is characteristic and carries its own comment. I am at the right place and with the right people. But my case is of long standing and it will take time. You remember that our dear Horace<sup>2</sup> said: "I'm tired, damned tired, God damned tired." You are too young to know what that means. I do! I'm trying to get rested, but it's not easy. Yesterday the visitors came in a steady stream and were here till I went to bed. Dear Mrs. Curry,<sup>3</sup> as you know, is in New York. Her husband is doing some special teaching at Columbia. She ought to have a pleasant and restful time after her hard labors for the past several years and I know you will be glad to help as you may have the opportunity. You are always with me, dear boy, always, and I am always with you.

My love to you all!

Yours devotedly,

E. V. Debs.

---

<sup>1</sup> The editorial referred to was from the Philadelphia Public Ledger and is reproduced on the following page.

<sup>2</sup> Horace Traubel, editor, critic and poet, and Walt Whitman's biographer.

<sup>3</sup> Mrs. Mabel Dunlap Curry, of Terre Haute, to whom Debs gave much credit for the national publicity and agitation that resulted in his release from Atlanta prison.

### The Unchanged Debs.

(Editorial from Public Ledger, Philadelphia,  
July 19, 1922.)

Eugene V. Debs calls from Chicago to the strikers "to strike together, vote together and fight together." His proclamation, done in the style of Trotzky, is exactly the brand in incendiarism expected from him. He is a twisted-brained old man, growing somewhat bloody-minded in his senility. Like some thin-necked and evil old bird, he perches in safety on the bough of executive clemency and croaks much the same kind of treason that slammed the jail doors on him in September, 1918.

His sentence was commuted last Christmas. Then the tide of syrup-mindedness was full and high. He left the White House, after seeing the President, posing as the good friend of all humanity. His declining years were to be devoted, not to preaching violence, but to work to end war. It was all very touching. All of the pacifist-conscientious objector crowd rubbed their hands in unctuous satisfaction.

The Debs of Christmas time has vanished. He now sneers at the workers for having fought and endured like men, rather than Socialists, in the war. His sneers are his sneers of 1918. The same old crooked-minded Debs again rails at them that the men who the workers supported in wartime are "now lined up against you in battle array and ready to shoot you down like dogs."

Because the government, in an hour of national emergency, proposes to dig coal to keep the nation from freezing to death and run trains to keep it from starving to death, Debs would have the strikers take up arms against the government that freed him from prison. It is the old, old stuff. Debs has mouthed it all his misspent days.

This martyred old man, this sweet and gentle, kindly and patient Socialist saint, of all the non-resisters does not seem to mind a little violence on occasion. "There have been," says he, "some slight disorders and a few scabs have been hurt." The dead at Herrin, for example, do not disturb him.

President Harding let him go. He handed him a commutation after Debs had served three years of a richly merited ten-year sentence for treason. His release was the triumphant culmination of a grand drive by all the sugar-tongued sentimentalists, paid propagandists, unpaid slush peddlers and meddling Matties who could be mustered. They overbore the judgment of the Administration and made him a free man; but they could not make him again a citizen of the United States. He is "A Man Without A Country," commuted but not pardoned, with the stain of what he did upon him.

Of course Debs should not have been released. His utterances prove it. He will cause the death of many another and better man before he is done.

Note—Those people whose feelings with respect to Debs are in accord with the spirit and letter of this editorial should be pleased to have their opinion of him reflected by such a staunch champion of respectability and Toryism as the Philadelphia Public Ledger, and those other people who believe in Debs and know him to be honest and sincere should not be discouraged at the tone of the above comment for it is but a single stone in the wall of reactionary thought and impulse against which they must test their strength if they would level it.—D. K.

Elmhurst, Ill., July 28, 1922.

My Dear David:

I have your kindness of the 26th, one of the many—I gratefully hold to your everlasting credit. It is vain to try to keep the visitors away and I regret very much the necessity of doing so, but the doctor says if I am not quiet and relax and avoid all excitement my shattered nerves will not improve and the treatment will have little or no effect. A Northwestern Railroad engineer has just come here with his auto to take me riding, but I could not go. Within an hour ex-Senator Pettigrew of South Dakota, who is now in Chicago, Jack Carney and Irwin St. John Tucker have telephoned wishing to see me.

Last Sunday I had some twenty visitors, and so it goes each day. It is not an easy matter, I assure you, for an agitator to be quiet, and I hope you will never find it necessary to do so. There is considerable mail coming to me here. So many good souls wish to cure me and insist I must give them a trial. Others advise me to pray and read the Bible and try their religious God then I shall be whole again.

The letter you enclosed was from Ruth K. W. Thompson, New York, who wishes to know the first incident in my life I recall for a symposium. I shall write and let her know. I had a telegram from the Women's Peace Union asking for a brief message to show on the screen at their two peace demonstrations in New York tomorrow night. I promptly wired the desired statement. Harriot Stanton Blatch has sent me the two splendid volumes of her mother's life,

letters and service for review.<sup>1</sup> I cannot, especially in my present situation, do justice to the task, but I shall do the best I can as soon as I have the chance.

No, dear David, please don't send me any books for I shall not have much time to read here. A dozen have already been sent and I have scarcely had time to look at them. Irwin Tucker brought me his "History of Imperialism," a book that is an achievement.

I have just finished "Jennie Gerhardt," the copy you were so good as to present to Kate with its precious inscription, and was deeply moved by it. I thought of you as I went over its pages and some time we shall talk over this absorbing and pathetic story by your friend Dreiser. He has vivid imagination and undoubted power in the portrayal of his interesting characters. It is easy to understand why his work is not popular with the Puritans and prudes of various shades. He is too rigidly honest and true to the truth of life for their delicate sensibilities.

I feel none the less grateful for your kind offer to send additional books. The offer is so like you and shames me when I think of your wonderful devotion and your kindnesses without number and how less than nothing I have been able to do in return. You have done for me, dear boy, a thousand times more than I shall ever be able to do for you.

The indications are that the money returns from the prison articles will be very meagre as only a few papers would handle them. They want none of me,

<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Cady Stanton, by Theodore Stanton and Harriot Stanton Blatch.



and with but few exceptions, they rejected the offer, some with contempt, and one prominent publisher with the statement that he would not give them space at full advertising rates. Selah! They know not how they compliment me. They recently decided to dispose of me in a conspiracy of silence and the papers at Terre Haute, as I happen to know, were under orders not to mention my name. I shall pry them open in due time, when the necessity arises.

I feel flattered by dear little Walta's<sup>a</sup> gracious appreciation of the inscription on the picture—so very slight a thing to do for the blessed child. Please give her a kiss for me and tell her I love her very dearly.

When I came here the patients, nurses, doctors and attaches presented me with a written welcome through Prof. Levy, Physical Culture Director; and filled my room with the reddest and most beautiful of roses. Today, through Miss Julia Culver, a Bahai leader, they presented me with a wonderful fountain pen in a blue morocco case and a beautiful ink well. They have all been extremely kind to me ever since I have been here. Miss Culver is a rare young woman who has travelled all over the world. She heard me speak to the students of Harvard at Cambridge about 25 years ago on which occasion Miss Longfellow, daughter of the poet, who was in the audience, introduced herself and congratulated me cordially on my address. Miss Culver had gone to the meeting as a reporter, expecting from what she

---

<sup>a</sup> Walta Whitman Karsner, my daughter, to whom Debs presented his autographed picture.

had read of me, to see a monster in human form. She said she was never more surprised, that she heard me with tears, took me by the hand, and has been my friend ever since.

I did not intend to say so much for I know how busy you are. Ryan Walker is to blame and he will get his when I catch sight of that curly culprit. His beautiful Maudie has my sympathy. Just the same, give him my love and pass it along and believe me, my arms are about you all.

Yours always,

E. V. Debs.

Lindlahr Sanitarium.

Elmhurst, Ill., August 9th, 1922.

My Dear Davy:

You'll see by this that my "nerve" is coming back, else I'd hesitate long, knowing how busy you are, to further impose on your best of good nature. Can you give attention to enclosed letter from Rita Benton?\* I can't handle it from here. If you are too busy please decline flatly and return the letter. If your busy hours will allow, kindly drop her a line, thanking her and tell her that I very much appreciate her friendly interest, but as my activities are so restricted as to be almost cut off, I have referred the matter to you. Ask her to send you the play, and if

---

\*Miss Benton, Chicago, wrote saying she had written a play using the experiences of Debs for the plot. She asked him to read her play and give her his permission to publish it.

you find it O. K. you can advise her accordingly, and she can proceed to have it published. You may be able to make some suggestions. Please thank her for her kind invitation and tell her that maybe at some time later I may be able to do myself the pleasure of a visit.

I am getting a lot of letters, all kinds, about the prison articles. Not a word of adverse criticism so far—all friendly, appreciative and grateful. I enclose an average one. Please take the time to read it through. It is worth while. There is a human story in it that would make another "Miserables." I have no doubt it is absolutely true. He has no motive in lying now. Thus are the innocent outraged and started on the road to hell. When you have read the letter please forward it to Theodore with the slip attached.

Our dear Carl Sandburg was here yesterday and sadly enough I did not get to see him. I was under treatment and the doctor has become very strict from necessity. Sunday brought a lot of callers—the doctor would not allow me to see them as there had been a large party here Saturday evening to whom I had to make a little address. On Sunday two scouts determined not to leave without seeing me. The young lady in the office had told them positively they could not see me; that the doctor had strictly forbidden me to see visitors. But they stayed and kept posted as sentinels. In the evening I had to go to the village post office to post some important

matter in answer to a telegram and to get a bit of air and exercise. The post office is three-quarters of a mile from here. I was shown out the back way but they spied me and followed me, and as I left the post office and started for a walk they stepped up and flanked me with the cheeriest of greetings. It's no use, David, you can't be dead while you're alive.

Mrs. Ralph Chaplin and her little son came to see me last evening, and, in company with several other fine women, we had a couple of very interesting hours together. She is a brave, noble woman with a lofty spirit, worthy in all regards of her great souled poet-husband.\* The little boy is a remarkably bright and beautiful lad and a world of comfort to his adoring mother and his cruelly imprisoned father. My heart aches for the dear and devoted wife and child. I know how they feel and what they suffer. When I think of Ralph Chaplin, beautiful poetic spirit and great-souled comrade, in that capitalist prison-hell all the blood in my veins runs hot as flame. He will not be there much longer, I am sure. They have held the boys about as long as they dare.

Some day there will be an accounting and some of the plutes will be glad enough if they may save their hides in the steel burial vaults that now hold the Chaplins and Bentalls. Did Theodore send you

---

\*Ralph Chaplin was convicted with members of the Industrial Workers of The World in August, 1918, of violating the espionage law. His offence was editing an I. W. W. paper that disapproved of war. He was sentenced to serve twenty years at Leavenworth, Kansas federal prison. J. O. Bentall received a small sentence for similar offence. Bentall was a Socialist.

a copy of my tribute to our old family doctor who died since I came here? If not, and you care to see it, ask him to send it to you.

My love to you, dear David, all the time.

E. V. D.

Later: I've telephoned Carl Sandburg and will see him later. When I get on my feet again we'll make Madison Square roar. One visitor yesterday said he was a chiropodist and had come to trim my corns. He said when that was done I would at once feel better. I had to postpone the trimming.

Lindlahr Sanitarium.

Elmhurst, Ill., August 10th, 1922.

My Dear David:

Had a wonderful two hours with Carl Sandburg and his sweet little eleven year old daughter this afternoon, and his visit rested, refreshed and rejuvenated me. We sat in the shade of the great old elms and poured out our souls to each other. I had not seen him for fourteen years. Since then he has scaled the peaks and written his name among the stars. Carl Sandburg is one of the very few really great poets of our day, and the future will know him to the remotest generations. He lives only three blocks from here and I shall have his three little household gods for playmates and that will be the most vital part of my restorative treatment.

Carl loves you dearly and we had you for a text. I can't chance libel proceedings by repeating what was said of which you were the innocent victim.

David, I've just received a beautiful letter from Mr. Hastings H. Hart, President of the American Prison Association. He highly commends the articles, but has only seen two of them and wants the rest and also the book when the latter comes out. I've sent the letter to Theodore and he will refer him to Wheeler of the Bell Syndicate for the complete series. Now, Davy, I know how fully your time is taken up, but if you can manage to call on Mr. Hart I would be very glad to have you do so and have you bear my greetings to him. His office is at 130 East 22d Street, New York City. You might phone him for an appointment. I feel sure he is a very fine man.

You no doubt saw the article by Engdahl in The Worker anent the Moscow cable. He addressed his article to me. He asked me for a statement. I made none but I answered him through Theodore, and I think I made my position and the reason for it clear to him. At least it was in very plain terms and I hope he will publish it.\*

Best love to you and your pals,

E. V. D.

J. Louis Engdahl,  
Editor, The Worker,  
New York City.

Terre Haute, Ind.  
August 9, 1922.

Dear Comrade Engdahl:

Your letter to 'Gene of the 3rd inst. enclosing a copy of The Worker containing a marked article addressed

---

\* Debs' views transmitted through his brother Theodore Debs are given in the following letter to J. Louis Engdahl, editor of The Worker, a weekly paper published in New York.

to him duly reached him and has been forwarded to me for attention. 'Gene is sick and undergoing treatment and in his condition and situation he is unable to give personal attention to matters of this kind but he directs me to make answer to you as follows:

He has no statement to make. The cablegram to Moscow speaks for itself. It requires no explanation. It states his position and by that he stands. The attempt to make him appear the enemy of Lenin and the Soviet government in face of the fact that from the hour that government was born he proclaimed himself its friend and has stood by it and defended and extolled Lenin and Trotzky in every word uttered and written, is too false and silly to merit attention.

Your indictment of the Social Revolutionaries is complete, but there is another side, and you make no mention of it. In the conflict between the Bolsheviki and the Social Revolutionaries the wild excesses were not confined to one side, as you would have it appear—the Social Revolutionaries were the victims as well as the perpetrators of outrages, and if they had been victorious and were now trying the Bolsheviki for high crimes in their courts with conviction as a foregone conclusion, 'Gene would protest against their execution as he does now against that of the Social Revolutionaries.

He does not believe in revenge, in capital punishment, in cold blooded murder, and these brutal passions and atrocious crimes are all the more reprehensible in his eyes when committed in the name of the law and justice by Socialists who have for years been denouncing capitalism for these identical infamies.

If we believe in blood-thirsty revenge, in cruel reprisals and savage killings to satisfy our law and ethics, we are even lower than the capitalists and their mercenary hangman who at least make no pretense of such humane ideals as we profess and shamelessly betray the moment we succeed to power.

It will be insisted that the execution of the defendants in this case is a revolutionary necessity. 'Gene denies it! He is convinced that the murder of these men would betray the weakness and fear of the Soviet government and bring it into contempt all over the world among people who now give it their allegiance and support.

To be great enough, human enough and generous enough to punish these men with their liberty instead of the hangman's halter would be the civilized method of dealing with them, thus setting up the higher ethical standard we profess and thereby commanding the confidence and respect of the whole world.

The Soviet government has nothing more to fear from these defendants. Let it set them an example in Soviet morality and humanity and even the bitterest enemies of the Soviet government will be to that extent disarmed and silenced.

'Gene does not defend the acts of the Social Revolutionaries. He pleads for their lives as he would if they were the vilest criminals on earth and if they had attempted to assassinate him instead of Lenin his attitude would be the same.

From the standpoint of mere policy, leaving out the question of human life, mercy instead of revenge at



this time would be infinitely the wiser course of the Soviet government; and as a loyal supporter of Lenin, Trotzky and the Soviet government, 'Gene fervently hopes they will pursue that course.

'Gene wishes me to say to you that personally he owes nothing to the Communists. When he was in that hell-hole at Atlanta the Communists with but few exceptions ignored him and the rest of the political prisoners, and their papers, including the one you now edit, were cold-bloodedly silent, not raising a voice nor lifting a finger to secure their release, and so far as they were concerned, 'Gene would still be rotting in his dungeon in Atlanta.

You are at liberty to publish what is here said and if you do kindly send me a marked copy.

'Gene wishes me to thank you sincerely for your message of personal kindness and to send to you his cordial regards and best wishes, to which I take the liberty to add my own.

Yours fraternally,

Theodore Debs.

Lindlahr Sanitarium,  
Elmhurst, Ill., August 11th, 1922.

My Dear David:

A thousand thanks! You are kind in such a gracious and seductive way that I fear you invite imposition. You cannot know how much I appreciate the willing and precious services you render me from time to time, especially in my present situation. I am very glad

that despite your own exacting duties you found time to send for and read Miss Benton's play and I know it will have your sympathetic attention and fair judgment. I knew the postcard picture I sent you would make Ryan Walker shudder and turn pale—the next one will leave him speechless and he will wire his apologies. I guess I do look fairly well in the picture and I am feeling better, but my case is one of long standing and the progress is necessarily slow. The system is largely one of elimination, purging the blood of impurities and the organs of morbid matter, and to do this requires time, according to the nature of the case—all the way from two months to a year. But I have full faith in the nature cure system and the methods of treatment and I feel confident that when I do leave here I shall have my strength and vigor restored and for the first time in many years be free from aches and pains.

Carl Sandburg called me by phone Sunday—wanted to take me out riding in his car but I could not go. Maybe next Sunday. Carl is certainly a great-hearted lovable lad as well as a poetic genius. Soon after he left a railway mail clerk running between Chicago and Kansas City came with his car to take me out and I was able to leave here then and enjoyed a pleasant ride with him. A striking shopman has just been here saying the strikers were all wishing I'd get well soon as they needed me now as never before, which was very kind of him. A comrade and his wife were here today, coming all the way from Salem, Illinois, to bring me their arms full of beautiful flowers. In the flowers there was a card inscribed as follows: "Only those who

have heard the alarm clock at 3 a. m. can realize the feelings of the exploiter who has heard you herald the new-born day of peace before his dream of exploitation came true." A flattering compliment indeed that I could wish myself worthy of. The comrades are kind to me in every imaginable way. I can feel the vibrations from their loving and loyal hearts by day and by night with the magic of healing in their wings.

Yes, I think the prison articles read very well and that they served all the purpose possible under the limitations of the capitalist papers, and when I get back to my work I shall take up the matter of book publication to which I am not now able to give attention. Thank you for finding time to see Mr. Hastings—I am sure he will be glad to see you and that you will find in him a friend.

You were once more kind and thoughtful in enclosing the Centurian containing the exchange of letters between Mr. Glenn Frank, editor of The Century and his subscriber over the atrocious crime of admitting me to the columns of the Century. Like you, I think Mr. Frank answered in just the right spirit and said the right thing in the right way. It is sad to think that that subscriber is typical of the dominant element of the society in which we live, and if he had his way you and I would be burnt at the stake. Mr. Frank is a very fine man personally as well as the cleverest of editors of the old standard magazines.

My heart and all love to you, dear David, all the time.

Eugene V. Debs.

Lindlahr Sanitarium,  
Elmhurst, Ill., August 23rd, 1922.

My Dear David:

Your letter is beautiful and your article is fine, and both give me inexpressible satisfaction. Thank you, dear David, with all my heart. I'd love to say a good deal more but have not a chance. The mail increases day by day and I can't take care of it.

Sinclair Lewis is here and will be here for ten days. He's great and fine and I can't tell you how much I love him. Last night for the first time I had to break the Sanitarium's rules. I was with Carl Sandburg and Sinclair Lewis at the Sandburg home till midnight, and then that beautiful brace brought me home. It was a wonderful occasion — an event in our lives. Mrs. Sandburg and her mother and the three dear children did the hospitable services for us and we were in Paradise after our own hearts. You were of course with us. Lewis and Sandburg love you just as I do. Sinclair Lewis will stay here until he is fed up in a way to satisfy him. He has the all-seeing eye and the all-understanding soul and nothing escapes him.

Carl gave me his poems inscribed by himself and Lewis in a way to make me blush deep with humility. Carl came with his guitar Saturday evening and gave the patients here a most charming entertainment in folk lore, etc. It was a complete conquest and they all love him. Lewis will also entertain them and the patients here feel big with importance. No "Main Streeters" here.

Love, dear David, always,

'Gene.

**Postscript:** It's perfectly wonderful that you have written another "Debs." You've long ago exhausted the subject. How in the world do you do it? I fear you'll be disappointed for your labors. But it's mighty fine of you and my heart sings gratefully at the thought of you and the mention of your name.

E. V. D.

Lindlahr Sanitarium,  
Elmhurst, Ill., September 9, 1922.

Dear David:

When I hear from you it is always in loving kindness. The village postmaster has just handed me the latest book from your hands bearing the love in which it was sent in its flattering inscription, and I thank you utterly with the wish that I could think of at least some little things in return for the big and beautiful things without number you have been doing for me these many years.

I am keen on "The Trail of the White Mule" (the title of the book which Debs is acknowledging) in zestful anticipation of an early conquest but as to his being "stabled in Terre Haute" — well, if there's a cranney anywhere without his stall I don't know where it could be found unless it would be in Ryan Walker's festive imagination. Anyway, I shall read the book, and coming from you, it will of course be with profit and joy.

Sorry to say that Sinclair Lewis was called East before your book and letter came. I had a beautiful

farewell letter from him saying he would see me soon after I got back to Terre Haute. Carl Sandburg is forwarding to him your book and letter. He is a great-souled genius and one of the choicest spirits I have ever known. He is just a big, beautiful boy, free as air and natural as sunshine, and Theodore and I both loved him at sight. Lewis and Sandburg are fit companions, genial, fun-loving, whole-hearted and generous, as well as princes of the pen and masters of the literary art. Lewis and Sandburg as distinctively American novelist and poet, with the cosmic understanding of the universal appeal, have already acquitted themselves with enviable distinction and achieved enduring fame, but they are still in their adolescence and have but laid the foundation of the temple that will bear in fadeless letters their deathless names.

We had some wonderful sessions here and you should have been at each roll-call. We settled all the great questions of the day with ease and dispatch, and in the plans we laid the sidereal universe will rank as a small concern. We sped in our flight "from star to star as far as the universe spread its flaming walls," and infinitely beyond in our dreams and aspirations, and we decided to remain here until they were all triumphantly realized. God smiled, I know, for He put us up to it and He knew that we knew that He would stand loyally by and see us safely into the radiant realms of our rosiest dreams.

Yes, dear David, you missed it for we were loaded with riches and soared among the stars—while it lasted

—and that was long enough to keep our spirits attuned to the infinite and our torches flaming forever.

With love and my heart, dear brother o' mine,

Yours always,

E. V. Debs.

P. S. Dearest David:

This moment received your loving message and your beautiful pen picture of Theodore\* for which I thank you from a full heart. It is so sweet and fine and true, and I cannot tell you what happiness your wonderful appreciation of the dearest brother in the world gives me. There is no other like him—there couldn't be. He is by far the better part of me. He is and does the thing for which I get the applause. It's because you love Theodore as you do that I love you as I do. A thousand thanks with my heart in them all!

It was very thoughtful in you to send a copy of your "Debs" book to Sinclair Lewis and I thank you for doing so. He will be glad to have it for he expressed the desire to have a copy.

### Theodore Debs.

This being Labor Day, I am expected to write something appropriate to the occasion. For many years a Socialist paper never went to press on Labor Day without an article, a special message or an address from Eugene V. Debs. This year finds him in a sanitarium. That is one of the American labor movement's misfor-

---

\* I include the tribute to Theodore Debs written by myself and published in the New York Call, September 4, 1922.

tunes. I should like to give myself the pleasure of saying something about his brother, Theodore Debs.

A woman who has known the Debs family intimately for many years said to me one evening in her New York apartment: "Anyone who knows and does not love Theodore is only pretending his affection for 'Gene.'" I think that is correct. It is a thousand pities that Theodore Debs has permitted his light to shine so little in the world, for he possesses qualities that equal those of his famous brother, and he has a personal charm that wins the coldest heart and draws it to his hearthstone. He has been content to remain in the background and his many talents are buried under his bushel baskets of service given to humanity through his elder brother.

Somewhere Bernard Shaw says if a man does not shout his wares up and down the street he has nothing to sell. It may be well enough for one to say as much who has been accustomed to shouting his wares not only in his own community, but who has convinced others in distant lands that it is for their own intellectual and spiritual good to shout such wares for him. Happily, Shaw has something to sell, and it would be well for the world to buy abundantly from his counter; but Shaw knows, if anyone does, that some people who have most to sell have the least inclination to hawk their goods, while many who succeed in drawing attention to themselves and their stall are shoddy persons dealing in shabby goods.

In the scriptures it is written: "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works



and glorify your Father which is in Heaven." Perhaps many of those who permit their light to shine, brilliantly or feebly, according to their vanities and their talents, are only endeavoring to live up to the text. Let us believe so, for kindness' sake. But we know that many people, whose one light might pale a thousand lesser luminaries, prefer the background to the stage and find more peace of heart and mind in the quiet word and the gentle glance than in the wild hurrahs and emotional acclaim that greet a celebrity.

Such a man is Theodore Debs. I have often wondered about him, for it is easier to comprehend a man of the calibre of his famous brother, who found what he wanted to do in the world and does it as far as he is able and is permitted, than it is to understand a man of the mental stature and spiritual breadth of Theodore, who possibly wanted to do the same things and didn't. There is a philosophy of realism in life and it tells us that, as a rule, people do what they must; that most of us, given a reasonable amount of opportunity and a fifty-fifty break with conditions and circumstances, spend ourselves and exert our talents in proportion to our wont and our abilities. Is it so? Sometimes. The rule varies, as rules must.

Here is a case where the circumstance negates the rule, if there is one, for Theodore Debs possesses ability that has never been called forth, and he has positive talents that have remained latent for want of the situation necessary to summon them. The world, such as it is, expresses its opinion of men in terms of their achievements or their failures. Still, it is impossible for a man to fail where he has not aspired to succeed.

Horace Traubel once wrote: "I could never be conscious of defeat, for I have never striven to conquer. Never having sought a place on the lists, how could I be disappointed when my name is omitted? While the crowd acclaims the victor with loud hurraing I can afford to be jubilant over myself in the silences."

Those sentences might easily have been inscribed to Theodore Debs, who is satisfied to be silent when the multitudes cheer his elder brother, for in his own soul he has the knowledge that much of what Eugene means to the world is due to his constant care and his service lovingly rendered.

In thinking of Theodore I have often asked myself the question: Why should a man sacrifice his life for his brother's good? "Am I my brother's keeper?" Yet, given the choice of having his own life for himself or yielding it to his brother it seems quite clear that Theodore deliberately chose his course, hence the sublime sacrifice exists only in the mind of the world that observes it—that world which is too grossly selfish to admit that it is good for a man's soul to give himself without reservation to a person or a cause in which he finds comfort, joy and solace in the quiet hours when the noisy world is sleeping off its material debauch. By giving himself without stint to Eugene, Theodore has the double pleasure of knowing that he has given himself to both a person and a cause, for Eugene is a living symbol to Theodore of about all in this world and after that is worth a man's while. It is not only a question of believing in his brother, but a matter of embracing his brother's cause. Eugene's victories are Theodore's, and likewise his defeats.

There are some instances in history of great brotherhood; not many, to be sure, but enough to assure us that love is possible and is an imperishable monument to those who possess it for another—a shaft more enduring than granite.

I am not sure Theodore has made a sacrifice of his life by giving it to his elder brother. I do not see how he could have done otherwise. I do not know that there dwells in the heart of Eugene any regret over Theodore's course any more than Eugene himself wishes that he had been less abundant with his love and life that he has showered upon the world without thought of his own personal fortunes.

Two men could not possibly be more suited to each other in a relation of brotherhood. I have heard Eugene admit many times that no man ever had a more loving and faithful brother than he has in Theodore. I have heard Theodore say that Eugene is his right arm and that he would rather serve him than anything or cause on this earth. Theodore believes so implicitly in whatever Eugene elects to do that if the elder brother were to decide that it would be a service to the cause for him to ascend Mount Calvary I guess Theodore would trail the same path and carry one end of the Cross of Crucifixion.

Now that I have said something about Theodore Debs, I feel tempted to say more things about his wife and daughter; but, after all, they should be talked about on parchment threaded with strands of gold.

Elmhurst, Ill.  
September 11, 1922.

My Dear D. K.:

You did not hear from Theodore because the rascal was away—blew in here and came near inciting a riot, and only Gertrude and Marguerite saved him from a sentence to the Sanitarium. The scamp finally purloined my B. V. D.'s which he has just returned with an apology which will avail him nothing when I get the kinks out of my anatomy and get in working order again.

As for myself, I was delayed by writing on account of an unusually strenuous and exacting program including special treatment which kept me fully occupied. But you have my letter by now with at least a feeble expression of my appreciation. It was a beautiful thing for you to do (refers to tribute to Theodore) and you did it your usual beautiful and gracious way. It was better to me a thousand times than purest gold and set my heart aglow with greater love for you, dear Davey, and sweeter pride in the noblest brother that ever brothered a brother in all the files of Time.

You know that Theodore has all his life been big sister to a little brother to me, and that we have been pals, one and inseparable, since the day he was born. Coming from you, this beautiful tribute, this garland of roses from the garden of your love is sweet and precious indeed and will touch every responsive chord in Theodore's tender and devoted heart.

You are truly a magical worker. How do you manage to do it all? I thought the book (referring to this

present volume) only started and here you have it finished. My only fear is that the subject is not important enough to merit such generous treatment. You are certainly doing your level best to turn my little alley into a great Broadway.

The treatment house is calling me and I must leave off—but my heart stays with you. Don't wait for me to see the manuscript of your book about me, or anything. You know I have full faith in you and all you do. Go right along with my approval in advance.

My flag's at half mast since Theodore, Gertrude and Marguerite went home, but Katherine will be here soon. Wish you could spend an evening with us at Sandburg's. It is a sure enough little heaven—Carl and his lovely wife and three wonderful little Sandburgs. Love to Ryan Walker and all the rest.

My love to you pressed down and spilling over.

E. V. D.

Elmhurst, Ill., September 23, 1922.

My Dear David:

Please say to Charles W. Ervin that his very kind, appreciative and inspiring telegram set my heart aglow and compensated me a thousand fold for the slight service he so graciously and generously acknowledged. Many thanks to you, too, for kindly giving me your column\* for the Ralph Chaplin article.

I note with pleasure what you say about Mrs. Curry's part in the beautiful tribute to Theodore,

---

\*Here and There and Everywhere, a daily personal column of faith and opinion, appearing in The New York Call.

which makes it doubly sweet and precious to both him and me.

Please say to Ryan Walker that he is unconditionally pardoned, with all humble apologies for the indignities to which he has been subjected. The Taft cartoon at the head of the Chaplin article squares everything. It is a stroke of genius—nothing less—the face he put upon that pauch. I've wept and shrieked over it. He couldn't do it again in a lifetime. That's Taft to a hair and it's the first and only true picture of that dressed beef. I've written Theodore about it at some length in my excess of exuberance. That Taft picture, tell Ryannie, wipes the slate clean, gives him a clean bill, restores his standing and reinstates him with full citizenship as the accredited representative of the gang at the Court of Elmhurst.

I have just received from August Claessens a pamphlet that is more to me than would be a ton of gold that's piled up in the U. S. Treasury.

For the check enclosed please get some little thing for sweet Walta and give it to her with my love and a kiss.

Always yours,

E. V. D.

Lindlahr Sanitarium,  
Elmhurst, Ill., October 14th, 1922.

My Dear David:

I am glad to hear you had such a fine letter from Sinclair Lewis. He's a mighty fine scout and you and he will love each other at sight. He's clean-cut,

big and genuine and on the program for a good deal bigger things than the big things he's already set going.

As to the visit of George Eckert, my sheriff and jailer of twenty-seven years ago, he and his daughter, Georgia, who have been my fast friends through all the years, spent Sunday afternoon with me, were my guests for supper and during the early evening hours. They drove fifty miles in their car from Woodstock and we had a most delightful time going over the jail days again.

He was all through the Civil War and is now 81, but sprightly as a boy. I never had warmer friends than Mr. Eckert and his wife and daughter. My wife and I have received holiday and other reminders from them regularly ever since. Mrs. Eckert, dear soul, is dead. She wept as if her heart would break the last time I saw her over twenty years ago when I bade her goodbye after a brief visit between trains. I had not seen any of them since.

When I first landed at Woodstock some of the farmers who thought me a monster (some of them had threatened lynching on my arrival) called on Sheriff Eckert to have him "treat me rough," but he told them I was his prisoner and should not be treated worse than any other. Within twenty-four hours after I got there we were fast friends and boon companions, and have been ever since. He and his daughter are as fine as they can be. Soon after I was released from Woodstock jail, Mr. Eckert's daughter, who was president of the Relief Corps auxiliary to the local post of the G. A. R., arranged

a meeting for me at City Hall, and it proved a notable occasion.

Pardon haste, David, I've got a busy day before me.

With love as always. Yours,

E. V. D.

Lindlahr Sanitarium,  
Elmhurst, Ill., October 22, 1922.

My Dear David:

Thank you for the extra copies of The Call Magazine, the clippings, etc.—all interesting and appreciated.

In the enclosed old leaflet you will find an excerpt from a speech I made in 1904—18 years ago—and it seems to me so pat, so applicable to the present campaign and political situation that it occurs to me you might care to reproduce it in The Call with a little explanatory note.\* But I wish to save the leaflet for my files—the only one I have—and I wish you would kindly return it to me when you are through with it.

Love to you all with a swift swish for Ryan Walker where it will do the most good (?)

Yours always,

E. V. D.

P. S.—I think I told you I have a very long and beautiful letter from Theodore Dreiser which pleases me very much.

\* The excerpt referred to by Debs is from a speech delivered before the Socialist National Convention, in Chicago, May 6, 1904, accepting the nomination for President. The extract is so applicable to present day problems that I have given it space in the following pages.



**From Debs' Speech of Acceptance of the Nomination  
for President, 1904.**

"There is a Republican party; the dominant capitalist party of this time; the party that has its representative in the White House; the party that rules in both branches of Congress; the party that controls the Supreme Court; the party that commands the press; the party that gives inspiration to the subsidized pulpit; the party that guides every force of government; the party that is in absolute power in every department of our public affairs. And as a necessary result we find that corruption is rampant; that the Congress of the United States dare not respond to the demands of the people to uncover the sources from which corruption flows like lava streams down mountain sides; that they adjourned long before the regular hour in order that they might postpone the inevitable.

"There is a Democratic Party; a party that has not stock enough left to proclaim its own bankruptcy; an expiring party that totters upon the crumbling foundations of a dying class; a party that is torn by dissension; a party that cannot unite; a party that is looking backward and hoping for the resurrection of men who gave it inspiration a century ago; a party that is appealing to the cemeteries of the past; a party that is trying to vitalize itself by its ghosts, by its corpses, by those who cannot be heard in their own defense. Thomas Jefferson would scorn to enter a modern Democratic convention. He would have as little business there as Abraham Lincoln would have in a latter-day Repub-

lican convention. If they were living today they would be delegates to this convention.

"The Socialist Party meets these two capitalist parties face to face, without apology, scorning to compromise; it throws down the gage of battle and declares that there is but one solution of what is called the labor question, and that is by the complete overthrow of the capitalist system.

"On this occasion, above all others, my comrades, we are appealing to ourselves, we are bestirring ourselves, we are arousing the working class, the class that through all the ages has been oppressed, crushed, robbed and debased, for the one reason that it has lacked the consciousness of its overmastering power that shall finally give it supreme control and make it the sovereign ruler of the world. This class is just beginning to awaken from the torpor of the centuries; the most hopeful sign of the time is that from the dull, dim eye of the proletaire there shoots forth the first gleam of intelligence, the first signal that he is waking up, and that he is becoming conscious of his power; and when through the vitalizing power of the Socialist Movement he shall become completely conscious of that power, he will overthrow the capitalist system and bring emancipation to his class."

Elmhurst, Ill., October 31, 1922.

My Dear David:

Your several notes with enclosures have all been received. I am glad you had a visit with Dreiser

and I know it afforded mutual happiness, and I feel flattered to have been so kindly remembered. I hope some time to have the pleasure of meeting him. He has two letters from me which you are at liberty to use if you care to in connection with his to me, if he has no objection. The communications, as you are aware, are in regard to the removal of his brother's remains for final burial, over which a controversy has unfortunately arisen.

The article about Ben Hecht was sent to you because I knew you were interested from a reference you made to him in your column some time ago. I have not read his books, but I have been for him ever since I heard of this assinine attempt to anthony-comstock him and his novels. I have noted with interest what you say of your association with him and your estimate of him and his work.

I wonder how in the world you find time to do all the work you seem to be doing. I fear you are working too hard and I feel almost guilty to think you gave up your Sundays and summer evenings to do the "Talks in Terre Haute," but I am at least glad you are not sorry to have made the sacrifice.

Your column always bubbles and sparkles. In the issue of the 28th it is especially interesting. Lena Morrow Lewis is one of the noblest of women, as I have reason to know, and I am glad you have paid her a well-deserved compliment. And I was pleased, too, by the fine tribute to Amy Winship, grand soul that she is, who in his life was the the trusted friend of Lincoln. More need not be said. My heart ached

for the nameless woman in prison and my arms reached for her. Assuredly there is greatness revealed in her letter or she could never have risen so far above her brutalizing surroundings.

May the gods prosper you and give you the strength for your great work!

With love,

E. V. D.













