



EUGENE VICTOR DEBS
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Talks With Debs In Terre Haute

(and Letters from Lindlahr)

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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