

**LABOR AND
FREEDOM:
THE VOICE AND PEN**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649515370

Labor and Freedom: The Voice and Pen by Eugene V. Debs

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
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EUGENE V. DEBS

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Labor and Freedom

The Voice and Pen
of Eugene V. Debs

While there is a lower class I am in it;
While there is a criminal class I am of it;
While there is a soul in prison I am not free.

Published by
PHIL WAGNER
St. Louis
1916



Introduction

I think if I had been asked to name this work that comes to us from the rare mind and tender heart of 'Gene Debs, I would have called it "The Old Umbrella Mender." It was this tragic, touching tale that I first read in the manuscript; and it is the memory of this that will always return to me when I think of the book. It is the perfect painting from the artist's brush—the sculptured monument from the master's chisel—that makes one lowly, loyal soul to live forever in the hearts of humanity's lovers.

Not but that every line in the book is a treasure, and every sentiment brought forth an appeal to all that makes for justice, and equality, and freedom; nor will it detract from, but rather add to, the beauty and inestimable value of the entire collection if others, likewise, carry with them the image and memory of the old umbrella mender, as they travel with Debs the struggling, storm-tossed way of Labor and Freedom.

HENRY M. TICHENOR.

St. Louis, March 1, 1916.

MISCELLANY

THE OLD UMBRELLA MENDER.

Coming Nation, March 1, 1912.

It was on a cold morning late in November last, just after the national election, and I was walking briskly toward my office. A stiff wind was blowing and a drizzling rain was falling. The threads in one of the ribs of my umbrella snapped asunder and the cover flew upward, as it has a way of doing, and I was about to lower my disabled shower-stick when I ran slapdash into an old itinerant umbrella mender with his outfit slung across his back and shuffling along in the opposite direction. He had noticed the ill-behavior of my umbrella. It snapped from its bearing even as he had his eyes upon it. Perhaps it understood. Anyway he had not a cent in his pocket and he had not yet breakfasted that cold and wet November morning.

He was about 65. His clothes had evidently weathered many a storm and besides being worn and shabby were too light for that season. Overcoat he had none. Nor gloves, nor overshoes. Mine embarrassed me.

His hat had been brushed to a standstill. His shoes were making their last stand and a protruding toe, red with the cold, seemed to have been shoved out as a signal of distress.

The outfit of the old fellow, carried on his back,

was sorry enough to fit his general makeup, and if he had offered himself for sale just as he stood, including his earthly belongings and his immortal soul, he would have found no bidder nor brought a cent.

The face of the old umbrella mender lighted up with a kindly smile as he commented on the strange conduct of my umbrella in slipping a cog just as he happened to come along. I asked him by what evil magic he did the trick and he laughed in a half-hearted way just to be polite, but it was plain that he had long since forgotten how to laugh.

As we stepped into the shelter of an adjoining store he sat down on the steps and drawing a threaded needle from beneath the lapel of his thin and faded coat, he began to sew the cover back into its proper place. His fingers were red and numb. A discolored nail partly hid a badly bruised thumb.

He had difficulty in doing this bit of sewing, and it plainly distressed him. His eyesight was failing and his fingers were stiff in the joints. Yet he strove eagerly and intently to master their dumb protest. And he hoped, as he remarked, that he would be able to make an extra bit of money to provide himself with a pair of spectacles, now that favorable weather had set in for his trade.

Poor human soul, I thought to myself, as I looked down upon the weatherbeaten brother at my feet! A vagabond dog among his kind would