
Allegiance to Principle

by Eugene V. Debs

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To men of well developed, healthy, vigorous minds, in which noble ambitions take root and thrive, where generous feelings and kindly sympathies hold sway, there is always to be found the tenderest regard for home, for youthful scenes, and memory treasures nothing so fruitful of felicity as

The orchard, the meadow, the deep-tangled wildwood,
And every loved spot which my Infancy knew! ¹

It does not matter that they have traveled, in their own and in foreign lands. It does not matter that fortune has smiled and that they have become rich, and exchanged the cottage for the palatial residence; it does not matter that they have formed new associations and have changed surroundings, they still cherish "with fond recollection" "the old oaken bucket that hung in the well," and "the old family Bible that laid on the stand they still recall with delight the old school house on the hill or in the valley, and often early associates pass in review, and especially is it true that their comrades, those with whom they were associated in their early struggles to advance, whose companionship and friendship they enjoyed and upon which they leaned, are never forgotten. There is no nobler trait in man's character than this keeping fresh and green throughout all the vicissitudes of life, fond memories of home, of kindred and comrades. To forget them, to turn from them, to neglect or disown them, is universally regarded as apostasy in its darkest and most repulsive form. It takes the form of ingratitude, and Shakespeare says:

I hate ingratitude more in a man
Than lying, vainness, babbling, drunkenness,

¹ From "The Old Oaken Bucket" (1818), by **Samuel T. Wordworth** (1785-1848). Slightly misquoted by Debs, corrected to the original here.

Or any taint of vice whose strong corruption
Inhabits our frail blood.²

This fealty to early friendships and associations, this unflagging and unchanging attachment to comrades, is universally regarded among all honorable men as convincing testimony of a noble, generous, courageous nature, and the absence of it becomes equally convincing, that the victim, whatever may be his surroundings, is to be numbered among the world's unfortunates.

It should be understood that our remarks are not intended to apply to a class of men whose childhood and young manhood was bereft of examples and associations such as inspire noble ambitions, in whose memories there are few if any pictures, the contemplation of which are fruitful of felicities, and who in mature manhood remember only scenes and associations calculated to deflect them from pathways of rectitude and usefulness. Of such men it is not to be expected that they will supply the world with examples of unwavering devotion to things of good report, and yet it may be said that instances are numerous in which noble examples of courage and fidelity to obligation have won from the ranks of men whose early life was clouded by the misfortune of neglect and examples of vice, and given them worldwide fame as the champions of principles which are admitted to be the bulwarks of society.

As a general proposition, and in the highest degree commendatory, men are inclined to regard their own country, their own homes, the school, the college where they were educated, the church where they worship, and so on to the end of the chapter, as the best, and on all proper occasions they do not hesitate to give their reasons for their preferences. No man ever lost character or prestige by championing such convictions, on the contrary, in the estimation of men of correct sensibility, the man who asserts his allegiance to home, country, church, school and friends, to all institutions that have helped him to advance or held him from retrograding, is esteemed virtuous and courageous. He at once takes a position as one who, however fiercely the storm may beat, however sanguinary may be the battle, can be trusted. He will not flinch. He will not tamely surrender. He will not abandon his cause nor his comrades. He can neither be bribed nor intimidated. He will never sacrifice his independence nor his self-

² From *Twelfth Night, Or, What You Will* (1602), Act 3, Scene 4, by **William Shakespeare** (1564-1616).

respect. He admires friendship but detests the schemes of the flatterer. He knows his duty and dare perform it. He will not apostatize. He is neither traitor, deserter nor bounty jumper, and he has unmitigated scorn for the man or set of men who by any mean artifice seek to humiliate him in his own estimation or in the estimation of others by "going back on his friends and associates."

To illustrate, there was established in the year 1873 a Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen. What of it? What of its foundation, its growth, its prosperity and present position? Why was it organized? To answer such questions would require more space than we have at our command, nor is it required that we should enter into details. Go back fifteen years, start with Lodge No. 1, and then march with the brotherhood in its continental journeyings until you are the guest of Lodge No. 400, and you can answer our interrogatives. It will be seen why the brotherhood was organized, and the measure of its growth and prosperity will be comprehended. Has it made mistakes? Certainly, and as certainly there are dark spots on the shining disk of the sun. Has it had defeats? Often. Vanquished? Never. Victorious? In the history of brotherhoods nothing more resplendent can be found. Its career is one splendid victory. Has it met every obligation? The records show that it has not only met every obligation, but that in the spirit of fraternal forgiveness it has exceeded its obligations. It has taken delinquents by the hand and lifted them into fellowship, and poured its treasures by thousands to make joyous disconsolate widows and orphans. We could write in eulogistic phrase for hours, and tell the truth, of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen. But our purpose is to ask the membership of our powerful and prosperous brotherhood if there is any other brotherhood in existence that has a more resplendent record, of duty done, good work performed, of obligations met! If so, what brotherhood can make the boast?

To be more direct, is there a brotherhood of railroad employees that has a better record than the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen? If so, name it. We are not aware of its existence. We have no adverse criticisms to offer on any brotherhood of railroad employees. This *Magazine* has demonstrated in the past that it is the friend of them all. It seeks to bind them in the closer bonds of federation, for the good of all. We simply assert that the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen is the peer of the best and abreast of the most advanced. Is it a question of brains? Is it a question of courage? Is it a question of fidelity to obligation? Let the questions multiply until they include all

things for which manly men should strive, and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, it will be found, is not required to take a back seat — and yet it is found that the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers assumes to be the superior brotherhood, and that there may be no mistake upon the subject, places two laws upon its statute books, at once an insult and a menace to the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, and then with an effrontery that defies exaggeration, solicits members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, men who for years have had locomotive firemen for their associates, for their comrades, with whom they have associated in the lodge room, and around the counsel boards of the order — to apostatize, to strip themselves naked of independence, of self-respect, disown their brothers and trample upon oath and obligation that they may be eligible to membership in the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers. Why? Wherefore? What is to be gained by this apostasy? No man answers the questions. The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers is as silent as a tombstone. Its Grand Chief has never ventured a reason or an explanation. The organ of the order wisely remains silent. Are the engineers better men than the firemen?

Have they more brains, more courage, more character, more of anything that entitles them to respect? To answer such questions, let it be said that the entire membership were but yesterday locomotive firemen — the knights of the pick and scoop. The Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen made them engineers. They are bone of its bone and flesh of its flesh— and yet, this Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, grasping its bootstraps, and with haughty, disdainful, consequential airs, seeks to lift itself into such prominence that no engineer in its charmed circle, who is a member of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, can represent his Division in the Grand Councils of the order, and as if that was not the climax of insult and unmitigated insolence, it further enacts that no engineer, a member of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, shall ever become a member of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, until he has renounced his parent brotherhood, cleansed himself of the odium of being a brotherhood fireman. Having done this, having thus committed moral suicide, having apostatized, and gone forth like Cain with a mark upon his brow, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers if they choose may take him in. And suppose he is taken into that brotherhood, what does he gain? In what way is he benefitted? No one knows and no one attempts to explain. Nor is there any superior advantage to be

secured, or if it can be shown an advantage does accrue, how will it appear contrasted with the sacrifices made to secure it?

It is not surprising that the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers seek to make the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen its recruiting camp, its breeding pen, but it would be surprising if Locomotive Firemen, members of the brotherhood, did not at once, and in manly emphasis, rebuke the spirit which prompted the enactment of laws by the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, than which no greater indignity could be offered them. And just here it should be said that there are thousands of Engineers who view the subject as does the *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*. That ultimately the odious laws to which we have referred will be repealed we do not doubt, but while they stain the statute books of the B. of L. E. no engineer, a member of the B. of L. F. should seek to enter the engineers' brotherhood. He should not permit himself to be cajoled nor intimidated, and any attempt of that character should be met with a firmness and sternness that would be so convincing that the party trying it on would realize that the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, and each member of the order, proposes in the future not to yield to arrogance nor to retreat one inch from the high ground it has taken, that when reciprocity is disdainfully declined, dignified non-intercourse will be maintained.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport

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