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# Editorial Message to the 9th Annual Convention of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen

by Eugene V. Debs

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Success is labor's prize,  
Work is the mother of fame,  
And who on a "boom" shall rise  
To the height of an honest name?  
[*Harper's* for August.]

The meeting of our 9th Annual Convention brings with it a feeling of success that is encouraging beyond an ordinary degree.<sup>1</sup> It is the success of a teaching that is noble and elevating. Our calling in life is a humble one, but we have brought it far above the degraded condition that it occupied a few years ago. At that time we struggled beneath a false education that received an impetus from a popularity that should have given its frown where it smiled. This degradation came from the baseness of the animal of our humanity, by drowning our finer instincts in liquor and dissipation. A drunkard is a murderer of the vilest order; he kills all the divine of his nature and leaves but the ungovernable baser passions to ruin his health, his intellect, and his soul. We have supplanted those vices and in their stead we have implanted aspirations for a higher and nobler ambition. We have per-

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<sup>1</sup> The 9th Annual Convention of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen of the United States and Canada met in Terre Haute, Indiana from September 11 to 15, 1882. Although Debs delivered a detailed report to the gathering detailing the financial and editorial matters of the organization over the previous year the published minutes do not indicate that this editorial message was delivered orally.

sistently kept before the eyes of our members the dignity of self-respect — and we need not enlarge on the requirements to support this. We have removed from the minds of our members the false light that has heretofore existed in which they looked on the relation of employer and employee, and showed them clearly how closely one was identified with the other.

We wish it understood by these few, whose narrow minds seem to hold a contrary opinion, that we are men as other men, with the feelings and affections of other men, and holding a right to a consideration, when our interest and welfare are at stake, which we are determined never to relinquish while Christianity and civilization exist, or a free people hear a grievance and announce a judgement. This has been, and shall continue to be, the teaching of this Order, and the success that has crowned our efforts breathes upon us a refreshing smile. But our duty, our undertaking does not end here: We attend the sick, we bury the dead, and give to the widows and orphans a proof of our heartfelt sympathy in dollars and cents, the requirements of this world's demands upon us.

Railroad corporations and railroad managers, superintendents, and master mechanics all over the country have given us most flattering proofs of their appreciation of our good work, not only by their many acts of courtesy extended to our Organizer and Instructor [S.M. Stevens], but also to our traveling delegates, and in many instances they have displayed a personal interest in the welfare of our Subordinate Lodges. We shall simply say here that such acts of kindness are not lost upon us.

Now, as to our standing today. Entering on our tenth year, we shall briefly state that we number 115 Lodges, with a membership of about 5,000. We have paid in the past year \$20,000 on insurance claims to the widow and orphan fund, and have a balance of \$10,000 in the treasury. Our organizer and instructor has traveled about 50,000 miles in the interest of the Order, pushing on far into the territories, organizing Lodges at Mandan, Dakota; Chama, New Mexico; Eagle Rock, Idaho; and Cheyenne, Wyoming, leaving a most substantial proof of his work behind him.

Our list of subscribers to the *Magazine* has increased to nearly 8,000, scattered all over the United States and Canada, giving us a direct and unbroken chain of communication every month.

Prosperity looks upon us at every hand and invites us onward and upward in our noble mission.

The convention will be an occasion of pride and satisfaction, for the members will receive an ovation at Terre Haute that will never be forgotten. The people will receive them with a warmness that will strongly indicate the standing that the Brotherhood has where it is best known.

Let us, then, join hands and hearts anew in this commendable work, and while congratulating ourselves upon triumphs of the past let us nerve ourselves for the grand achievements yet in store for us.

*Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport*

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