
Invincible Men

by Eugene V. Debs

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True courage has in all ages challenged the admiration of manly men, and womanly women. Courage is not bravado, bluster and brag. Such things are characteristic of cowards, chicken-hearted, creatures, who simply have the form of men. They are fair weather sailors, parade drill soldiers. In times of storm they want to get into the fore-castle, be- tween decks. The surging billows and the howling wind frighten them. Their influence is demoralizing. In time of battle, such creatures skulk. Their hearts get down into their boots. They are the first to run and hide. The storm of battle, the whir of bullets, the scream of shells, the sulfurous smoke, and the sight of blood suddenly reduced them to a limp condition. All too often, they can't help being cowards; they were built that way, but the fact seldom lessens the contempt they receive from all brave men. This thing we call physical courage, may be cultivated, developed sometimes, until the weak-kneed raw recruit may be made an unflinching veteran; but as a general proposition, courage is an inherent quality, and is certain to make itself visible the instant danger appears.

We hear much of "moral courage," which stated tersely, means that a man has the courage of conviction. Men, who when persuaded that they are right, stand forth, and stand firm, in the defense of the right as they understand it. For this right they will make sacrifices. They will endure privations. They will look poverty square in the face and defy its blighting power, such men are the salt of the earth, they are the glory of our much abused human nation. Remove them from the active participation in human affairs, and Jehovah would again repent that He made man at all. The man of physical courage has won all the battles of the world since the ark rested on the summit of Ararat,¹ and the men of moral courage have gained every victory for principle since the day that Jehovah wrote upon tables of stone the

¹ *Genesis*, chapter 8, verse 4.

moral law of the world.² The men of moral courage are invincible men. They will, if need be, stand alone. They will say, we know we are right, and though all the world deserts us, we will stand by the right. Look at them, moral heroes. They loom up like mountains in the midst of mole hills. They are the hundred armed oaks in a forest of weeping willows. Have we such men nowadays?

Behold the invincible engineers, firemen, and switchmen, on the lines of the CB&Q system of railroads. They have the moral courage to stand. They asked only for the right; not for themselves alone, but for every locomotive engineer and fireman and switchman, on all the 140,000 miles of railways in the United States and Canada. Nor do the rights for which these invincible men contend, end with engineers, firemen, and switchmen, but include every other railway employee, and every bronze-browed working man who depends upon his toil for his daily bread. All hail the strikers on the CB&Q. Oratory never had a nobler theme. No pomp and circumstance surround them, no ovations attend them, and yet, they stand determined and hopeful. They present a magnificent spectacle for workingmen to contemplate, for they are fighting against tremendous odds, the battle of labor. The opulent CB&Q corporation could rob them, but it could not degrade them, and now the striking engineers, switchmen, and firemen, as true to principle as the needle to the pole, are inviting the world to look on and see men of more than Spartan courage stand by principles which once cloven down in America signifies the enslavement of workingmen.

The fight is the fight of organized labor against soulless corporations, and labor organizations now have an opportunity to contemplate an exhibition of moral courage which redeems human nature from the curse of degradation, which, without the united resistance of workingmen, is as certain to come as that rivers flow to the sea. The example the engineers, firemen, and switchmen on the CB&Q are now engaged in setting for workingmen, will not, we are confident, go unheeded. They are defending a principle which must be maintained if workingmen are ever to have their rightful share of the wealth they create.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport

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² *Exodus*, chapter 20.