
Remarks to Children in Trenton, Ohio, Sept. 29, 1908 by Eugene V. Debs

Originally published in the *Toledo Times*. Quoted as part of article "Red Special Goes East" in *Appeal to Reason*, whole no. 672 (Oct. 10, 1908), pg. 4.

* * *

School Children Came Through Rain.

The *Toledo Times* tells a story so characteristic of Debs that we strain the crowded columns of the *Appeal* this week to give it to our readers. When the train reached the town of Trenton [OH] on its way to Toledo it was found that the school children had planned to visit the train in a body, but its arrival ahead of time threatened to interfere with their plans.

But when Debs heard of it he declared that the train should wait until school was out. Although it was raining when school was dismissed the youngsters were soon seen running toward the train, the girls as fresh as daisies in a shower and the boys barefooted, so a reporter said, and continued as follows:

"At one end of the coach is the Red Special band, and in amongst them are crowded the school children, their curls wet with the rain, and their cheeks aglow with running, their eyes full of wonder. Gene mounts a seat, and crowded behind him are the members of his crew. Socialists who are traveling for the day, railroad officials, and even our dusky brothers who do us the service of waiting upon us at the table. All are leading forward, eager to catch every word that falls from Gene's lips, for all of us feel something somehow. In soft tones and simple words, Gene talked to the little ones. I can't convey to you the warmth of these words, but I'm glad to say I can give you the words,

because I took them all down. Bending over the children and with a voice husky, a little through his own emotion, Gene said:

“I wish to say to you boys and girls that I regard your coming here to visit this train and to see us as one of the most beautiful compliments paid us on the entire trip. You have all heard of James Whitcomb Riley the children’s poet. I happen to think just now of a beautiful poem he wrote a long time ago, which I think will interest you children. I will try to repeat it to you. You know that James Whitcomb Riley wrote “Orphan Fannie,” and “The Goblins Will Get You If You Don’t Watch Out.” You children who live here in this small place in the country are accustomed to the grass and the clover. You don’t know how lucky you are to live in a place like this. If you went to New York you would see children who never have seen any grass. They have never seen a live chicken or anything of that kind. They live in cellars and crowded places. They don’t know what clover is.”

“After reciting the poem,¹ Eugene Debs went on to say:

1 “The Clover,” by James Whitcomb Riley

Some sings of the lily, and daisy, and rose,
And the pansies and pinks that the Summertime throws
In the green grassy lap of the medder that lays
Blinkin' up at the skyes through the sunshiney days;
But what is the lily and all of the rest
Of the flowers, to a man with a hart in his brest
That was dipped brimmin' full of the honey and dew
Of the sweet clover-blossoms his babyhood knew?
I never set eyes on a clover-field now,
Er fool round a stable, er climb in the mow,
But my childhood comes back jest as clear and as plane
As the smell of the clover I'm sniffin' again;
And I wunder away in a bare-footed dream,
Whare I tangle my toes in the blossoms that gleam
With the dew of the dawn of the morning of love
Ere it wept ore the graves that I'm weepin' above.

And so I love clover — it seems like a part
Of the sacerdest sorrows and joys of my hart;
And wharever it blossoms, oh, thare let me bow
And thank the good God as I'm thankin' Him now;
And I pray to Him still fer the stren'th when I die,
To go out in the clover and tell it good-bye,
And lovin'ly nestle my face in its bloom
While my soul slips away on a breth of parfume

“You children are perhaps too little to understand the meaning of this special train. This train represents an effort to make it possible for all children everywhere to have time for play, and time to go to school, and the opportunity to grow up, and be useful. You know in this system there are a good many children, the children of the poor, who have got to go to the mills and the factories and have to work hard, and don't get any chance to enjoy life. There are many of these poor little children, and we are going to try to bring about a change so that all little boys and girls may have time to enjoy themselves, so that they may have good health, and go to school, and be well fed and educated, so that they may get all the benefits possible in order that they may grown up to strong manhood and lovely womanhood. You are just on the edge of these things and you will understand them by and by. You will remember, one of you perhaps, that you saw the Red Special train that represented the Socialist movement. For when you have grown up you will get the benefits that these men and women connected with this train are working for.

“On behalf of the Socialist Party, I want to thank each of you for having come here, for having given us this little visit, and for having given us a chance to look into your bright faces and shake hands with you. I shall ask the band to give you another piece of music. We wish you well in every way.”

“And the band did play with pleasure. Gene shook the children by the hand, not forgetting the dear little bare-legged boy with the crutch. And the folks looked at each other awkwardly and foolishly, because their eyes were wet with tears.

“And that's all. Except that it was a little drama that none of us will ever forget.”

Edited by Tim Davenport

1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR · February 2014 · Non-commercial reproduction permitted.