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"The Story of a Labor Agitator."

I can still see Joe Buchanan as I saw him in the dingy office of the Labor Enquirer at Chicago in March, 1888, his sleeves rolled up and his apron on, making up the forms for the press as I entered his office with a mutual friend to consult with him about the C., B and Q. strike, then at its height, and incidentally to ask him to waive his personal feeling against the engineers and give the strike the benefit of his and the Enquirer's support.

Buchanan was at that time the recognized leader of the labor forces of Chicago. His counsel was sought, his support solicited and his opposition dreaded. He was known as a fearless fighter and a hard hitter, and the columns of the Enquirer fully bore out his reputation.

For a moment after greetings were exchanged Buchanan glared at me. He had just locked up an elegant roast of P. M. Arthur and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers. The fact was that he was still smarting under the cold-blooded turning down administered to him by Arthur and the brotherhood when, at the head of the Knights of Labor, he led the strike on the Denver and Rio Grande in 1885, one of the fiercest and most stubbornly contested labor battles ever fought in this country. Buchanan narrowly escaped lynching by the hirelings of the omnipotent corporation, one of the leading dailies giving the cue as follows: "As the sun rises some of these fine mornings its glinting rays will fall upon the stiffened corpse of Joe Buchanan hanging to one of the cottonwoods in the Platte bottom." Fortunately his comrades rallied about, stood by and saved him, but had he fallen victim to the foul conspiracy of the corporation Arthur and his engineers would have been mainly responsible, for their desertion of the striking employees at the most critical hour left Buchanan and his men at the mercy of the enemy.

It is not strange therefore that Buchanan's ardor toward the engineers had cooled and that in their strike on the Burlington he saw at last his opportunity to play his hand in the game of retribution.

"But, Joe," said I, "strong as your case is, you still can't afford to stand by and see these workers crushed by the corporation without doing your best to help them. They need you, and surely you would not have it said that Joe Buchanan deserted labor on the field of battle."

The whole demeanor and expression of the agitator changed in an instant. "That," pointing at the form, "is my last kick. I am with you." And he was—to the end. He was in all our councils, early and late, he wrote and spoke and planned, he cheered the boys when their spirits drooped, and, although the strike was lost, he won their gratitude and respect.

It has been almost sixteen years since Joe Buchanan, fearless, honest, incorruptible, forced at last to succumb to privation, driven from the field by hunger pangs, has been in editorial control of the economic department of the American Press Association, whose labor page is known to workmen from coast to coast. Others have garnered the fruit of his labor and sacrifice—have won plaudits as they stood on the foundation he laid with his hands. He has had time for retrospect, for reflection and meditation, and as the frost that does not thaw crept into his locks the story of his tempestuous career as a labor agitator began to unwind from the spool of memory.

"The Story of a Labor Agitator," by Joseph R. Buchanan, is the title of the book, and the Outlook company of New York is its publisher. The book is precisely what its title indicates, and the story, which covers some of the most stirring scenes in modern labor history, is told in such wealth of vivid detail and charming candor that one is carried from the first page to the last without the intrusion of a single dull moment.

The volume is embellished with a splendid portrait of the author and is printed in clear type on the best of paper.

It so happened that when the first copy reached me I was getting ready to leave for the west. The book was thrust into my grip, and on the cars I settled back and read, or, rather, listened, to Buchanan's story. In fancy I heard his voice, now full of mirth and cheer and again grave and serious, swelling with dramatic fervor as the scene was changed and labor's body bleeding lay beneath the feet of power.

The voice of the story teller hushed to silence, I looked out of the car window. The dawn was in the eastern sky. The story had ended with the sunrise.

This book of Buchanan, with its eleven chapters and 461 pages, ought to be in every public library and every labor lyceum.

It is history as well as his story. It deals with the principal events of the ten stirring years from 1880 to 1890, embracing the Colorado mining strikes, the Gould Southwest, Union Pacific, Denver and Rio Grande, Wabash, C., B. and Q. and other railroad strikes, the eight hour agitation culminating in the Haymarket riots and the revolting legal massacre of the anarchists, in all of which Joseph R. Buchanan played a leading and honorable as well as a dangerous role.

This decade of industrial conflict should be familiar to every workman and every student of labor history.

Joseph R. Buchanan made his story before he wrote it. Much of it was made under circumstances which are unknown to those now on the stage.

It required genuine moral and physical heroism to fight for labor in the Rocky mountains twenty years ago. Joe Buchanan had both, and his labor record bears the royal seal of honor.

From first to last he stood for labor. He was threatened, but never cowed; tempted, but never corrupted; deserted and starved, but he never surrendered.

His heart was in his class, and every throb was true.

John Swinton knew his record and honored the man who had fought and fallen, been beaten and betrayed, denounced by capital and deserted by labor, who, though neglected, starved and alone, yet bore himself with dignity from the field of battle and preserved as sacredly inviolate his allegiance to the cause of labor.

His efforts to save the anarchists from the bloodthirsty cohorts of capitalism lay bare the great and generous heart that prompted and sustained him, and this chapter of the story is traced with such delicacy of touch, in notes of such tender emotion, that the reader's eyes are dimmed and from his cheeks the tears fall on the pathetic pages.

A great share of Buchanan's experience as a labor editor and agitator must remain unwritten. The few pioneers in Colorado who are still in the struggle remember many trials and privations which the single volume had not space to chronicle.

In the winter of 1897-98 I dropped into Wallace, Ida. Jim Callahan, a former associate of Buchanan, was editing the Labor Tribune.

"Do you know Joe Buchanan?"

"Do you?"

We sat up all night talking about the author of "The Story of a Labor Agitator," his paper, the Labor Enquirer, the strikes of the eighties, the threatened mob violence, the poverty, the suffering, the pawning of personal effects, even to the last articles of clothing, and we agreed that Joe Buchanan was a hero in the struggle for freedom and deserved to have his name written high on labor's roll of honor.

The secret of his fortitude, his defiance of privation, his moral courage, is not hard to find. The gods, sorely as they oftentimes tried him, favored him above most men on his wedding day. Mrs. Buchanan was her husband's rock of strength, his inspiration—aye, his very soul. In every hour of trial she stood resolute, undaunted, by her husband's side until the curtain fell upon the last scene of the last act in the "Story of a Labor Agitator."

EUGENE V. DEBS.
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