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GOMPERS AMONG NATION'S BUSIEST MEN AT CAPITOL

(Continued from page 1) Some judges with chips on their shoulders. Post haste to New York. A telegram comes—summoning him post haste to New York. It is thirty minutes to train time—and he can reach the station in fifteen. Good! fifteen minutes more to write. And he writes on and on until the door opens and he is reminded of the time. Off comes the skull cap, on goes the street garb, and he is hurried to the station—and Sam Gompers, President of the American Federation of Labor for over thirty years, is speeding towards another conference many miles away. But he will be back tomorrow to go through the same grind. Such in brief is the life of Gompers. There are many remarkable men in Washington—none more fascinating as a study than the potential labor leader that a great many "masters of the community" who exploit the workers would love to railroad to the penitentiary on general principles. Gompers at Close Range. Consequently when asked to write today on something relating to labor, I immediately thought of Gompers and, knowing how completely his time is occupied, wrote to arrange an interview. It was four days before he could reach me and then he could give me but an hour. But an hour with men who do things is more than an eternity with the loafers of the world. Nevertheless I decided to interview his secretary preparatory to meeting the chief. This secretary is a woman—Miss R. Lee Guard, who has been with him for fifteen years. When she first came up from the south and became associated with him she had no sympathy for the labor movement, her conversation was rapid. It was through her that I got the skeleton of the biography. Consequently, I was prepared for the big chief on the following day. I was smoking when I entered and was startled to hear him roar—"And he descended in a cloud of smoke." I might have taken it for a rebuke had I not known that Gompers is an inveterate smoker. There was an expression of mirth in his eyes, but his face betokened great weariness. On the table which separated us sat a toy rabbit—the Gompers' mascot. On the wall facing me hung a picture of John Mitchell. A hasty inventory of his features showed me that his lips were thick, his hair sparse and gray, hanging in long strings behind. He seemed the personification of power. "Every one knows your work," I began, and I want you to talk about yourself." He looked dubious, shrugged his shoulders—a habit of his. "I'm not so much interested in that," he replied. However I persisted in my cross examination. Little by little I dragged forth the story I was after. Because his caste of features many think he is a Jew but this is not true. His Forebears Tollers. "As far back as I can trace," he said reluctantly, "my people have been workers. We went from England to Holland in 1755. I was the first of eight children. Some of my people in Holland and France have money—but they struck off at other lines. We have all been workers." He rather employed the boastful tone in telling me his family were workers—rather slurred the tone in admitting that some had money. It was just as though he were admitting that some of his ancestors had stretched a rope. "We lived on the east side in London," he continued, "we were a brick of the silk weavers and it was just during the transition period when hand work was giving way to machinery, throwing hundreds out of employment. These poor unfortunates were wont to tell of their misery and misfortune in the streets and it was one of my earliest recollections. The memory of that has never left me." In a Clear Factory at 10. He had only reached his tenth year when he went to work in a clear factory. "There was no agitation then against child labor," he remarked dryly. "Then we came to New York and we went to work." "How did you educate yourself?" I asked. "It used to be the custom among cigar makers," he replied, "to employ a reader who read to the men from the papers and from works on economics and sociology. This was invariably followed by discussions. We could do our work intuitively while we talked. After I went to New York we took turns reading, and I, being a fairly good reader, did more than my share, often reading an hour and a half and two hours at a time. In this way I became familiar with good literature, especially along economic lines. Then I read outside. My first reading was of the novels of Charles Dickens." Here Mr. Gompers might have told me more but he didn't. I learn from other sources that he is a constant reader of Shakespeare, carrying a volume about with him. Bobby Burns is another of his favorites, and he himself told me that he reads Mauley. Among the economic writers with whom he has been long intimately familiar are John Stewart Mill, Thorold Rogers of the University of Oxford, Le-Salle, Bebel, the German socialist, Ricardo and Henry George. Was a Ready Helper. "What was your early training in debate?" I asked, having in mind the westerly manner in which he invariably holds his own in verbal debate. "I belonged as a boy to debating societies," he said smiling, "and of the 'Judge and Jury clubs' that were in vogue in the sixties." "You still have experiences with judges and jury clubs?" I suggested, having in mind the effort to jail him for contempt of court. He smiled—a rather grim smile. "But I never acted as attorney for the prosecution," he added, "but always for the defense." "How old were you when you joined the union?" I asked. "When I was 14 years old," he replied proudly, then he added: "We now have 53,000 members of the cigar makers' union and our cards are numbered according to our entrance. This is mine." At that he displayed his book bearing the number 1. "I was president of my local for six years and in 1882 was made president of the American Federation and have been here ever since with the exception of a single year," he continued. His First Headquarters. Thinking of the enormous headquarters of the federation now, I was moved to inquire: "Where were the headquarters when you were first president?" "In my bed room," he replied. "Noticing the expression of incredulity on my face he continued: "That is literally true. The first headquarters were in my room in a New York tenement. It was not until 1886, four years later, that I got an office and then it was given me by my local union. It was a little rear room about 8 by 10 feet. I bought a desk for \$7, lumber for \$1.70 and an accommodating friend built me some shelves for nothing." "Didn't you have a stenographer?" I asked. "Oh, no, no, no," laughed Gompers. "In those days a stenographer and a typewriter seemed a luxury of the very rich to me." "And did you devote all your time to the work?" "Oh no," he replied. "There was no salary. I worked at my trade, taking an occasional half day off to attend to the work, and I worked Saturdays. Then in 1886 a salary was attached to the office of \$1,000 a year." "And then you gave your whole time?" I asked. "Yes indeed," he laughed. "The Federation demands an eight hour day for everyone but its president, and it specifically says that he shall give his entire time." New Force Created. "We then had about 50,000 members. We now have more than 2,000,000." "And how did people in those days look upon the federation?" "As a freak," he replied. "What is the attitude of congress now as compared to the attitude then in regard to legislation asked by the federation?" I asked. "No comparison," he answered, "we have grown." "We now have fifteen members of congress carrying a union card." After calling my attention to these union members, a reminiscent look flitted across his impressive features and he went on: Power in Politics. "It is not generally known, but it is nevertheless true that the fight against Cannonism in the house had its initiative in the American Federation of Labor. The real history of that fight when written will make mighty interesting reading." "And you and the federation favor woman's suffrage?" I asked. "We do," he replied warmly. "It will make for a larger degree of sociological and legislative activity. We who give our adherence to suffrage would first benefit the child—the greatest thing for human conservation; and the next we would bring about the proper regulation of women labor to protect women workers from exploitation. Suffrage will add tremendously, economically, socially, and morally in the sum total of human progress." "Mr. Gompers, what would be the result of the masses were the union destroyed?" I asked. "An expression of pain flitted across his face. He seemed to shudder. In a low tense voice, eloquent with feeling, he answered: "I would prefer not to think about it. It would be too horrible. But the union can't be destroyed now, not now." About Labor's Rise. At this he rose and painfully waddled across the room to a chart that hung on the wall. Illustrating by lines the numerical strength of the federation every year since its organization. He called my attention to the fact that while there have been slumps, there has been a consistent rise. As I stood before the chart and looked down into the care worn face of the grizzled warrior, I realized then more than at any other time how completely his whole soul is wrapped up in the labor movement. Noticing the weary look upon his face, I asked him about his recreations. "Do you hunt?" I asked. "No," he said quickly. "I never have. I never will—I won't kill." I was not surprised at the answer for I had heard from other sources the story of the pigeons that were sent him by an admirer for a feast—pigeons that he promptly gave to the aid again. "I exercise but little," he added. "My habits are necessarily irregular. I would not care to walk without a companion and my friends can't accommodate themselves to my convenience. My greatest pleasure is the opera." Loves Grand Opera. I was glad to have a verification of something I had heard about him, to the effect that he is inordinately fond of grand opera. I have been told by a friend of his that had his life been turned in other directions he might have been a great musician. After the labor movement, music is the one great passion of his life. He also loves drama. This and his love for good literature lead me to venture a deserved compliment. "I have heard you before congressional committees and have read your editorials in the magazines," I said. "Little Timorothy," and have been impressed by the elegance of your English. How do you do it?" He seemed rather abashed, like a girl of sixteen told that she is pretty. "I always try to express my thoughts in the best ordinary Anglo-Saxon at my command," he said. "I have never used slang except when it seemed the most effective medium of expression at a particular time. I think it a crime to speak slovenly when one can do otherwise." The hour that had been allotted to me was almost up. The conference that was to follow was about to begin. Mr. Morrison had already been summoned over the phone while I was there. I glanced at the clock. It gave Mr. Gompers his opportunity. Interview Nears End. "Organized labor is wielding an influence upon every public question never attained before," he said, delivering his peroration to the interview. "The world's thinkers are now beginning to appreciate the fact that the demands of labor mean more than that appears on the surface. They see that the demand for work is not alone one for the preservation of life in the individual, but it is a human, innate right; that the movement to reduce the hours of labor is not sought to shirk the duty to toil, but the humane means by which the workless workers may find the road to employment; and that the millions of hours of increased leisure to the overtaken workers signify millions of golden opportunities for lightening the burdens of the masses, to make the homes more cheerful, the hearts of the people lighter, their hopes and aspirations nobler and broader." As I clasped the hands of Gompers and left him to his conference I knew that I had been in the presence of one of the virile men of the age—one who had done much according to his lights to make this a better world in which to live. Though no longer working at the bench in a cigar factory Sam Gompers is capable of taking a "job" at the bench any time. I was shown a cigar he made one afternoon when he had a moment's leisure—a miniature cigar about an inch and a quarter in length in perfect proportion. The owner proudly unwrapped it for my inspection, tearing off sheet after sheet of tin foil. Profound Respect for Him. One might imagine from some of the papers of the country that this man is the incarnation of the devil. A certain gentry bent on reducing labor to a condition of economic servitude to the end that dividends may be paid on watered stock would like to see Sam Gompers behind the bars. Indeed just at this hour there are quite a few drawing room orators who would have labor leaders given to the gallows on general principles. There are some men on the bench who would love to gloat over Gompers in jail. But here in Washington where he is known best, this class of cattle is very small. Among the big correspondents of the metropolitan papers there is nothing but profound respect for "the old man." One of the disheartening features of the times is the fact that we become so wildly excited and so righteously indignant when a working man, driven to desperation, commits a crime, and yet when an officer in the woolen trust at Lawrence plants dynamite in the hope of discrediting labor unions and is caught red handed in the act, we merely shrug our shoulder and hold our tongues. Down in the mountains of West Virginia private detectives and private guards murdered workmen—in the name of law. I have heard of women down there in a delicate condition being kicked in the stomach by a brute employed by the trust and called a guard. I have heard of girls of sixteen—daughters of striking miners—being forced at the point of a guards' bayonet to wade a stream and hold her dress to her waist for the amusement of a gang of thugs who seem to have the protection of the law. And yet I look in vain for an impatient protest from the press. More seditious still, I have heard of no protest from the public! And reflecting upon this condition I was deeply impressed by Gompers when he appeared before a senate committee and thus referred to some of the unparadonable blunders of men who thought they served their union by the commission of crime. How Few Understand. "It is easy to blame," he said, "con- demn, yes, even to pity, but how few try to understand. Perhaps the man who works beside us is going through a cruel struggle and he is all but broken. Try to understand. We call him cheer, half-centered, turn to more cheerful companions. Perhaps for outer cloak of self-defense is but a shield to protect us from the overwhelming burden of the world's sorrow and the bitter wall of those who suffer. Whatever the reason many of us shut others out of our minds and hearts. We know little of those around, little of ourselves, the circumstances that mould our wills and thoughts, the mysteries of our physical and spiritual selves, and the strange relations and influences between one and the other. But when we will, we know that every fact, every condition, every person is the inevitable outcome of determinate forces over which individual volition may or may not have control." Two Men and a Cause. Just as the two foremost flowers in the labor world of America are Sam Gompers and Eugene V. Debs. They do not see alike. They do not work in the same groove. But they are alike in that they work for the masses of mankind according to their lights. These two men have both faced jail. Debs having served 90 days following the A. R. U. strike in 1894. Some one has said that there is nothing in the world or beyond it to compare with the ignorance and arrogance of mere self-sufficient wealth. Keep these two men in jail—it won't hurt them, it will glorify the jail. The time may come when this will be universally recognized. It can come none too soon. At least one thing is certain: the workers of the world will come into their own. It not today, tomorrow. And when that tomorrow dawns the figures of these two men will stand out, glorified in the sunrise. GOMPERS ANY SHIT OR OOPS. COAT \$15. VATTIES UP TO \$25. THE BIG DULUTH.

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