

Reminiscences of Myron W. Reed (November 1903)

Who that ever looked into his kindly eyes and felt the touch of his honest hand does not remember him with mingled joy and sorrow?

Myron Reed was indeed a man!

His love was boundless as all space, and his sympathy as tender and profound as that of the man of Galilee. And his noble courage in defense of the weak blossomed into glorious heroism.

He despised sham, scored hypocrisy, ridiculed ceremony, laughed at what the dudes and dunces of society call "good form," trampled roughshod upon conventionality, wore a slouch hat and gloried always in his natural self.

Many times he shocked the prudes because he would not pretend, dissimulate — because, no matter who, or what, or where, he would be no other than just Myron Reed.

He had all the imperfections of a perfect man.

All who ever knew him loved him.

He was hated only by the ones so mean that they are punished with distorted vision that mistakes a man for a monster and a monster for a man.

James Whitcomb Riley once said to me: "Myron Reed is a real man — a brother to his fellow man."

One Sunday morning the vast congregation at Broadway Temple in Denver, where Mr. Reed preached, was startled with the shortest, strangest, and sweetest sermon on record. The preacher was paler than usual, there were tears in his eyes, and his voice was tremulous with emotion.

"I can't speak to you today; the dog at our house is dead."

That, in my judgment, was one of Myron Reed's greatest sermons. There is more genuine religion in this utterance than in all the cold creeds and heartless theology of the world. Reed's very soul was in his speech as he declared his kinship with all breathing beings.

Walt Whitman, had he been present, would have understood. The great preacher's heart lay bare before his people. God had let them see a man — then crowned that man with immortality.

They who were too base to understand, and therefore hated Myron Reed, wondered why so many men and women and children loved him. How could any but the soulless help but love this big and generous man, who sobbed with aching heart because his faithful dog had died!

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The most abandoned wretch was sure he had one friend at least. He could appeal to Myron Reed and warm his heart to life again.

A mutual friend at Denver once told me of an impecunious fellow who was always borrowing and always broke. One morning he dropped in to make the usual plea for a loan. He was hard-pressed and must have a five dollar bill. But the story was stale and he was turned down and out.

Half an hour later Reed sauntered in. "Let me have five dollars," said the preacher. The money was handed to him and he walked out briskly and up the street. Around the corner waited our impecunious friend and into his outstretched hand was pressed the borrowed bill.

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During the strike of the Leadville miners in the winter of '96, I arrived in Denver one Sunday morning,¹ being met by Edward Boyce, then president of the Western Federation of Miners. We were to leave for Leadville the same night. The Coronado mine had been attacked,² a terrific battle followed, and many were killed and wounded on both sides. Everybody was armed, and the feeling was intensely bitter against the strikers. The press was virulently denouncing organized labor in general and Boyce and myself in particular.

This was the state of affairs when I met Boyce in Denver, on the way to Leadville. Boyce suggested that we go to hear Myron Reed. I readily assented. The Broadway Theater was crowded. Reed had resigned his pastorate and many of his people and a good many others followed him.

We had hardly entered when Mr. Reed arose and said: "I understand that Mr. Boyce and Mr. Debs are in the audience; will the gentlemen do me the honor to come forward and occupy seats on the platform?"

We were astounded, not dreaming that Mr. Reed knew that we were in the city. The effect was startling. Most of the audience looked upon us as red-handed murderers and the announcement fairly stunned them. Mr.

Reed hardly allowed them time to recover their breath. He introduced each of us to the audience as his personal and honored friend.

That was Myron Reed! I can see him yet — calm, serene, quietly exultant over one of his peculiar triumphs.

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It was during the strike of the miners at Cripple Creek that Myron Reed displayed his Spartan heroism and proved for the thousandth time his devotion to the working class and his implacable hostility to their oppressors. At this time he was still preaching to the largest church congregation in Denver and the elite of the city were well represented in his pews. They were attracted by the picturesque and brilliant preacher who spoke in a succession of electric flashes; whose epigrams blazed and sparkled with the living fire from his own genius.

Aesop taught in fables, Christ in parables, and Reed in epigrams.

Reed was at the very height of his popularity and power when the supreme test came. The state was being shaken to its foundations by the strike and revolt of the miners. The mining corporations had a horde of armed deputies in the field. The miners were besieged at Bull Hill. The state was on the brink of revolution, and the plutocrats were demanding the most despotic and repressive measures to crush out the rebellion.

Governor Waite was appealed to, but refused to allow the militia to be used as corporate hirelings and was threatened with impeachment.

Let it here be noted that Governor Waite stands solitary and alone as the only governor that ever used the military arm of the state government to protect the working class. This was his martyrdom. For steadfastly serving labor he was crucified — by labor.

It was in this crisis that Myron Reed expanded to heroic proportions. He had the ear and the heart of the people. Like a flash of lightning from a clear sky his famous epigram burst from his soul. It was a thunderbolt hurled by Jove himself — “My heart is at Bull Hill!”

The fashionable congregation was horrified — the plutocracy for the moment was paralyzed.

The fate of the fearless preacher was sealed. henceforth, he was a demagogue, and arch-enemy of law and order, and he must drain to the last drop the bitter cup of persecution and exile.



Almost the last time I called on him, he said: "Debs our friend Bellamy is here trying to recover his lost health. We must call on him and cheer him up and see what we can do for him."

The next morning we had our visit with the author of *Looking Backward and Equality*. The finger of death had already traced his claim in his pallid features. Edward Bellamy, great soul, was marked for the tomb.

"Perhaps," suggested Bellamy, "I'd better go South."

"I wouldn't," answered Reed, "there isn't a heretic in the whole South."

As we withdrew Mr. Reed turned to me and in a voice full of sadness said: "Poor fellow, he is hoping in vain; he'll soon be at rest."

As he said this and I looked into his own wasted features I said to myself: "Alas, dear brother, and so will you."

Bellamy soon afterward entered the shadowy vale and Reed was not long in following him.³

The recent visit of the delegates of the American Labor Union and the Western Federation of Miners to the tomb of Myron Reed, and the touching tribute paid to his memory by Edward Boyce, were fitting testimonials of Labor's gratitude and love.

The miners and their wives and children were loyal to him living and will venerate his memory though all coming years. Many others honored his high courage and stood nobly by him to the end.

When he fell asleep thousands wept as they built monuments of flowers above his dust.

He was a Union soldier in the Civil War and a civil soldier in the union war. He was the tribune of the people, the friend of toil — a soldier, a socialist, and a man.

Myron reed traced his name in deeds that live and coming generations will add fresh luster to his well-earned fame.

Published in *The Comrade*, vol. 3, no. 2 (November 1903), pp. 34-35.

¹ Debs arrived in Denver on Sunday, January 10, 1897.

² The Coronado mine attack took place during the early morning hours of September 21, 1896.

³ Edward Bellamy died of tuberculosis on May 22, 1898. Myron Reed died of chronic colitis on January 30, 1899.