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Bryan and the Presidency

"Crown of Gold
and Crown of
Thorns"—How
a Wonderful
Speech Won a
Presidential
Nomination



Mrs. William J. Bryan.

His Renomina-
tion In 1900.
The Dominant
Spirit of the
Democracy For
Twelve Years.
Bryan In 1908

By ROBERTUS LOVE.
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WHEN the Democratic national convention met at Chicago in 1896 one of the delegates from Nebraska was William Jennings Bryan, a young man of thirty-six, a private citizen of the city of Lincoln. His prior political career comprised two terms in congress. He had been his party nominee for a United States senatorship in a Republican legislature.

The national Democracy had broken away from Grover Cleveland, whom it had elected president twice and who was then in office. The split was on the money question. Cleveland had called a special session of congress to repeal the silver bullion purchasing act. The mass of the party stood for the free coinage of silver, chiefly at the ratio of 16 to 1. The Cleveland wing stood for the single gold stand-

long, were delivered by him on several days, while it was an ordinary thing for him to address twenty crowds at twenty different towns in twenty hours. The candidate showed a physique and a voice that stood the tremendous strain with marvelous endurance. As the campaign progressed and the fame of Bryan spread people got to sitting up all night and traveling many miles just to hear the phenomenon speak.

Bryan's first appearance in the east was on the 12th of August, when he delivered his speech of acceptance of the nomination. Madison Square Garden was packed with a suffocating mass of men and women, though it was one of the hottest days ever known in New York and a dozen persons had died from sunstroke during the day. Bryan read that speech from manuscript, a disappointing thing, for it detracted greatly from his eloquence. But the candidate was well aware that great issues hinged upon his utterances on that important occasion, and he did not care to trust himself to the uncurbed enthusiasm of the moment.

With Arthur Sewall of Maine, the vice presidential candidate, Bryan went down to defeat at the November election, though he had been nominated also by the Populist party, with Thomas E. Watson of Georgia as the vice presidential candidate on that ticket. McKinley and Hobart went into office, and there were those who predicted that Bryan was forever eliminated from the Democracy.

Four years later at the Democratic national convention in Kansas City Mr. Bryan was renominated by acclamation. There was absolutely no other candidate suggested for the nomination. For vice president Adlai E. Stevenson of Bloomington, Ill., who had been vice president during Cleveland's second term, was named. The war with Spain and our consequent acquisition of the Philippine Islands had brought new issues into politics, but the silver plank was reinserted into the Democratic platform, Mr. Bryan declining to stand for the nomination without it. It was expressly declared

Again the great east lashed and mumbled the western candidate with venomous denunciation, though at the time there was a very large increase in personal respect for Mr. Bryan. He had proved himself to be by no means the wild visionary, the utter fanatic, the stationer, the dangerous fanatic, with the opposition in his own party had pictured him as being in 1900, when the Democracy split open and the larger section thereof nominated a "gold Democratic" ticket, with General John M. Palmer of Illinois and General Simon B. Buckner of Kentucky as the standard bearers, thus contributing to Bryan's defeat in the first campaign. In the campaign of 1900 the Democratic seceders simply voted the McKinley and Roosevelt Republican ticket.



MR. BRYAN IN THE 1900 CAMPAIGN.

et. A second time Bryan went down to defeat, but gracefully and with good cheer.

He was at his home in Lincoln on election day, ate an early dinner, went upstairs at about 6 o'clock and slept soundly until 11, when he came down and discovered that he was badly beaten. He smiled to the assembled reporters, returned to his bed and slept soundly until morning. It was said by those present that he evinced not the slightest sign of disappointment.

Mr. Bryan did not seek the nomination in 1904. He was quite willing for the disaffected wing of the Democracy to name the ticket just to see if that element could do better than the other. He attended the convention in St. Louis as a delegate, made an amazing fight for a platform upon which he and his supporters could stand and won the fight by sheer force of brain and brawn. He arose from his bed on the early morning of the last day of the convention, though threatened with pneumonia, and just as the dawn was breaking over the city he delivered



WILLIAM J. BRYAN IN 1906.
"You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns. You shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold."

and. The mighty chasm widened at the convention. Congressman Richard P. Bland of Missouri, "Silver Dick," the old war horse of the free silver coinage movement, was the logical and apparently the inevitable candidate for the presidency. His nomination seemed to be a certainty until a thing happened hitherto unprecedented in American politics.

Bryan of Nebraska, known as "the silver tongued orator" and "the orator of the Platte," mounted the platform and delivered a brief but bold and masterful speech. His vibrant voice rang out over the heads of the 15,000 persons in the vast hall, penetrating with clarion intonation to the farthest corners. The customary uproar of a great political convention, which the strongest of oratorical lungs, as a rule, cannot quell entirely, was hushed into unbreathing awe. No such eloquence ever before had been heard in a national convention. The man and the occasion had met, and the man had mastered the occasion. The address was an impassioned appeal for bimetallism and an exalted glorification of the new Democratic financial doctrine. When the orator closed with his epoch making metaphor of "the cross of gold and crown of thorns" the enthusiastic approbation of his sentiments and of the man himself was indicated by a whirlwind of applause beyond description.

And William Jennings Bryan was nominated for the presidency of the United States.

Flashed to the remotest reaches of the nation, the news was the most sensational political tidbit that ever took the wires. Bryan was but one year above the minimum age required by the constitution of the United States for a president. While some of his speeches in congress a few years before had given him a momentary reputation, he was practically unknown to the nation at large, and particularly so to the great eastern section of the country. Never before had a great party nominated for president a man living west of the Mississippi river. Never before had so young a man been nominated. Never before had an orator won the great prize by a single speech. Democrats, Republicans, Populists, everybody wondered how the newcomer would conduct himself in the campaign.

Presently the wonder turned to amazement. Young Mr. Bryan was a campaigner—there was no doubt as to that. He injected into American politics a presidential campaign such as the nation never knew before. Men called it a whirlwind campaign, and such it was. The whirlwind road was the railroad, and it carried the candidate up and down and across the land upon an amazing schedule of traveling and talking. Mr. Bryan traveled in that campaign more than 18,000 miles and delivered considerably more than 2,900 speeches. He made forty-nine speeches in one day in New York state. Thirty-five addresses, short and



NEW PICTURE OF MR. AND MRS. BRYAN.

in the platform, however, that imperialism was the paramount issue of the campaign. The Democracy opposed the forcible subjugation of the Filipinos and the control of the archipelago in the colonial style of the British empire.

Mr. Bryan made another whirlwind campaign, even breaking his own record for traveling and speechmaking.



WILLIAM J. BRYAN, JR.

He was forty years of age and in the full flush of magnificent manhood. During the four years since 1896 he had done much political speaking and writing, he had lectured many times on other topics, he had traveled abroad and studied other governments and conditions of people; also he had come Colonel Bryan, having gone to camp during the Spanish war as colonel of a Nebraska regiment.

in that convention to the vast throng which had waited and sweated and fretted all night long just to hear him a speech which for pathos and power and thrill no inveterate convention follower ever heard equaled. The Democratic ticket, Judge Alton B. Parker of New York and ex-Senator Henry G. Davis of West Virginia, was defeated in November inexpressibly worse than was Bryan in either of his campaigns.

The discovery of vast deposits of gold in Alaska and elsewhere since the free silver campaign has eliminated the money issue from politics. Mr. Bryan has accepted this fact and now stands upon other Democratic issues. Despite all opposition, he has dominated the national Democracy for twelve years. For several years past he has given expression to his views in the weekly journal, the Commoner, which he established at Lincoln. He has removed to a fine farm near Lincoln, built a commodious residence and become known throughout the world as the "great American commoner," titular successor to Henry Clay. He has traveled around the world and written his impressions for a syndicate of American newspapers. He has been for years the most popular and highest paid lecturer on the American lecture and Chautauque circuits. It is said that his income from lecturing alone is as much as \$50,000 a year, the president's salary.

Mr. Bryan is a total abstainer from alcohol and tobacco. He is a member of the Presbyterian church and never works on Sunday, save to deliver a religious address now and then. His ideal is morality, personal, political and civic. The Bryan of 1908 looks older than the Bryan of 1896, but he is no less vigorous and virile than he was when his voice flashed across the continent from the Chicago convention hall.

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