

The Commoner.

WILLIAM J. BRYAN, EDITOR AND PROPRIETOR.

Vol. 3. No. 7.

Lincoln, Nebraska, March 6, 1903.

Whole No. III.



DEMOCRATIC OPPORTUNITY

Speech delivered by Mr. Bryan at Wilmington, Delaware, Feb. 18, 1903.

Friends and Fellow Democrats: It is very gratifying indeed to meet the representatives of the democracy of Delaware about this banquet board. This gathering is not much like the first meeting I had here. I came to Delaware at a time when you did not know me, and I did not know you. I have often thought of the first speech I ever made in Wilmington. It was not a large meeting; there was plenty of room in the hall for any others who had desired to come. And I introduced myself, because there wasn't a man in the community, so far as I knew, who was willing to take the responsibility of introducing me. That was only about six months before I came as a presidential candidate, when they nearly ruined the building trying to get in.

I have been interested in watching the growth of sentiment in this state and throughout the union, and I am not at all pessimistic in regard to the future. I am confident of the triumph of our ideas, never more confident than now.

It gives me great pleasure to meet with you tonight, as, last night, on a similar occasion, I met with some of the loyal democrats of Baltimore. I am glad to meet my old friend, Handy. There was a time along in the early hours of the morning at Kansas City, when he came in mighty "handy." They were discussing the platform down there, and he was loyal when we did not have any votes to spare when it came to a vote. I am also very glad to meet again my friend Gray, whom I learned to know years ago, and others with whom I have become acquainted since—the members of this democratic league, the democrats who have convictions and are not afraid to own them.

The campaigns of 1896 and 1900 brought out a great deal of moral courage. I have known some heroes in my day—men who had the spirit of martyrdom; men who were willing to suffer for what they believed to be right—and a man's convictions are better measured by what he is willing to suffer than by what he is willing to enjoy for those convictions.

You who live in these eastern states have had much more to fight against. The power of wealth is greater here than it is out in our country. You have had much more to contend against than we. You know we sometimes speak of those who come up "through great tribulations." That phrase can be applied to the democrats of Delaware, Maryland and other eastern states, for you have certainly come up amid great tribulations.

There is no doubt of the ultimate triumph of the principles for which you and I contend.

I do not come here tonight as a candidate for office; I do not come as a leader even, for, I am glad to say, the democratic party is in a different condition from that of a few years ago. Ten years ago leaders in the democratic party had more influence than they have now. We had leaders then, and we followed them, often followed them blindly. I remember a time—why, it was when my boy was born—when I was such an admirer of Grover Cleveland and John G. Carlisle that if I had named my child after public men, I would have called my boy Cleveland Carl-

isle Bryan. You can imagine how I would feel now if I had given him that name.

Now, these were our leaders, and, my friends, we have learned a lesson in regard to leadership. We have found that a leader ceases to be a leader when he ceases to have followers. As some one has remarked, the real leader is the man who is going in the same direction that the people are going, but is just a little bit ahead. That is what a leader is, he must be going in the same direction as the people. In fact, a great many people make a mistake when they think that the people, going in the same direction as they, are following them. If the man who thinks he is leading will just turn and go the other way he will be surprised to find how few of the people will turn back when he does. And so when people tell me that a change has taken place in the democratic party in the last few years, when they talk about the "remnant" who believe in the principles of the Kansas City platform—well, I have had too much experience to believe what they say, for I have spent now more than twenty years trying to change the minds of republicans, and I know what a slow process it is. I know also that the republicans have been trying to change the minds of democrats, and that is a slow process. Therefore I know that a man who talks about 6,500,000 people, turning around suddenly and going in the opposite direction does not know what he is talking about. Those who went down to defeat with us went down because they believed in the things that they fought for, and I know that they were willing to suffer defeat and fight for what they believed, rather than surrender their convictions on great questions in order to win any nominal victory, however great, that might be promised as a reward for that surrender.

I know that these have not changed and will not change their opinions on great fundamental principles. When I hear that people have met at some high-priced hotel and decided to nominate a candidate for the presidency who will accept the nomination only on condition that the platform repudiates the platforms of 1896 and 1900, it does not worry me. I say, "Wait until the fellows at the threshing machines; wait until the fellows in the shops; wait until the fellows who do the working and the voting; wait until these get together, and they will not ask such a man to accept a nomination for the presidency.

My friends, I want to predict that no man in your lifetime or in mine will ever be a presidential candidate on the democratic ticket who will be ashamed to admit that he stood for the principles set forth in the platforms of 1896 and 1900.

If victory were the only thing we were contending for; if we would put our argument on the low plane of trying to get the offices only, we could not afford to surrender our convictions.

If a young man comes to me and asks me how he can succeed in life, I tell him that first he must be honest; that, second, he must be industrious, and that if he is honest and industrious, his success will be measured by his ability. If he asks me if I can assure him success immediately, I tell him no; that no person can guarantee

anything in the future, either for himself or for anybody else. But I tell him that he cannot afford to build for today or tomorrow; he must build for life. And no man has an ideal that is worth following that is not high enough to keep him looking upward until he dies. No man has an ideal that is worth following that is not so far in front of him that he cannot overtake it while he lives. The young man who will build his life upon a firm foundation, who will be honest, upright and faithful to every trust, cannot live in any community twenty-five years without being called upon to act as the representative and spokesman of his fellows.

And so it is with the democratic party. If we attempt to build for tomorrow, we build in vain. If we attempt to catch a little temporary popularity by selling our principles on the auction block, or buying policies at a junkshop, we will not only fail of immediate success, but we will fail of ultimate success.

There never was a time when this country was more in need of a real democratic party than it is today. Never in this country's history did we need a more complete application of democratic principles than now.

We have suffered for ten years because in 1892 we had a victory for the name, without a victory for the principles of the party. In 1896 the democratic party was disorganized. Why? Because we had won a victory in 1892 that betrayed the hopes of the people who gave victory to the party.

Every little while I see by the papers that they are going to have a harmony meeting; that they are going to bring together the men who have fought each other. I do not believe that we ought to risk a harmony meeting unless we compel the people who attend to leave their revolvers at the door. There is no use in having a harmony meeting between people who dislike each other more than they dislike republicans.

I have been invited to one or two meetings where Mr. Cleveland was invited, and I have refused to attend. And I have refused on the ground that he twice helped to elect a republican ticket, and that he has never intimated in the least that he intended to be a democrat again. I would rather meet at a democratic board an open republican enemy than a hypocrite who pretends to be a friend of the party while opposing its principles.

But I have about made up my mind to accept the next invitation that I receive to a harmony banquet where Mr. Cleveland is to be present, but I shall make my acceptance conditional upon being allowed to take as my toast "Grover Cleveland and His Democracy." I think I can handle that subject in such a way that he and I will not be present at any more harmony banquets.

And I have a right to speak of Grover Cleveland's democracy—for I have borne his sins in two national campaigns. He has made the democratic party the scapegoat for his political crimes, and his record still hangs as a millstone about

(Continued on Page 14.)