THE CONVENTION OF 1896

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of both silver and gold at the present legal ratio of sixteen to one, without waiting for the aid or consent of any other nation."

As he paused again there was no general outburst, but individual calls from all parts of the hall, like the "Amens" in an old-fashioned revival meeting: "How was that?" "Give us that again!" "Read that once more!"

"If the convention will be quiet," responded Mr. Jones, "I will read it as many times as you want to hear it."

Every voice on the floor was hushed as he repeated the resonant phrases, carefully enunciating word by word. Loud cheers followed. He then pressed on to the legal-tender clause and the rest, but the ehthusiasm of the delegates had been aroused to such a fever-heat by the free-coinage paragraph that what came later won but an indifferent reception.

A diversion was created when "Ben" Tillman, of South Carolina, flung out a speech in which he frankly arrayed the south and west against the north and east and declared that another sectional struggle was at hand. Some of his adversaries tried to hiss him down, others started a band of music playing, but he persisted till he had exhausted the time allowed him. David B. Hill, of New York, came next, with a speech designed to furnish the convention with a basis for a compromise on the silver issue. But the convention would have none of it; the silverites were in the saddle, and they purposed staying there till they had routed the foe. Hill had a sore throat, too, which added to the impatience of the crowd, and, as his remarks were scarcely audible at my seat, I seized the opportunity to run out for a hurried luncheon.

When I returned, Bryan had just begun the speech for which he had been priming himself in the morning. Already he had the whole convention listening with such eagerness that no sound except what he was making could be heard even out by the doors. It was a hot day, and every one who could dispense with his coat, or his coat and waistcoat, his collar or his tie, had done so. As the speech advanced, heads were bent farther forward; men who were hard of hearing held their hollowed hands at their ears. The telegraph boys were spellbound, like all the others, and stood motionless, drinking in period after period with mouths open and eyes fixed. In spite of the heat, scarcely a fan moved in the galleries.

The speaker was in splendid form, his voice perfect, his memory true, his tongue unhalting. Steadily, like a skilled fisherman drawing his line taut, he led that audience of fifteen thousand souls after him to the conclusion:

"We shall answer their demands for a gold standard by saying to them, You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns!"

—here his two hands, raised to the sides of his head, the fingers spread and bent inward, moved slowly down and close up to his temples, so that a spectator was almost hypnotized into seeing the thorns piercing the brow and the blood trickling from the wounds—

"You shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold!"

The hands which had been pressing down the crown of thorns had left the head and followed the arms out at right angles to the body. And there stood the crucified man before us in the flesh!

For perhaps five seconds the orator remained immovable in this statuesque pose. Then his arms dropped to his sides, and he stepped very slightly back.

The spell which had held that great multitude in hypnotic bondage was suddenly loosed, and the storm broke. Men on the floor, men and women in the galleries, were on their feet, many of them on chairs, yelling like mad. Hats, canes, fans, handkerchiefs, neckwear, coats, waistcoats, newspapers—anything loose enough and light enough to be so used—were tossed into the air. The band was probably playing its loudest, for the cheeks of the musicians were puffed out and the conductor was swinging his baton like a vitalized pendulum; but so far as the audience were concerned it was mere dumb show. The hubbub would swell, and die down, and swell again like the surf coming in on an open beach. Scores of small American flags blossomed out all over the hall. The banners and standards of several states were caught up by the delegates nearest them, borne to the seats of the Nebraska delegation, and grouped around the Nebraska standard. In the whole multitude the only calm person was Bryan himself, who had retired to his old chair, and sat with his hands in his lap, responding pleasantly to the remarks his friends shouted into his ear, but with a detached air, as if the ovation were a tribute to some stranger and not to himself.

There is no authentic record of the length of time this extraordinary demonstration lasted. It had broken out so suddenly, and differed so in spontaneity from the customary uproar raised by the boomers of a candidate, that few persons had thought to draw their watches on it. It is safe to say, however, that a half-hour elapsed before order could be quite restored. Then Senator Hill, as the representative of the minority of the committee on resolutions, realizing the hopelessness of buffeting against such a tide as had risen for free silver coinage, but still resolved to give the convention one last chance to conciliate the eastern wing of the party, offered amendments to the financial plank making the legal-tender quality of the silver dollar inapplicable to contracts already existing, and pledging the suspension of free coinage if, after a year's experiment, it could not effect a parity between gold and silver at the existing ratio. Both failed ignominiously. Then he tried a resolution commending "the honesty, economy, courage, and fidelity of the present democratic administration." It was met with laughter and hisses. The party had cut loose from President Cleveland and purposed staying loose, and that was all there was of it. So, after the adoption of the platform as it had come from the hands of the committee, there was nothing left but to adjourn until evening. Bryan's friends realized the opportunity this breathing-spell would offer for active work in his behalf, while the well-advertised candidates saw that their only hope of staying the movement which obviously had set in toward him was to let the delegates be shaken up by a few hours' contact with the outside world.

The evening session was devoted to nominating speeches. The roll of states was called; Alabama waived its priyileges, and Arkansas yielded to Missouri so that George G. Vest could present the name of the man who for twenty-odd years had led every fight in congress in favor of free silver coinage, Richard P. Bland. Up to that time Bland had been looked upon by the public at large as the most promising candidate in the silver faction of the democratic party. He had come into the convention with four states at his back and pledges from a number of others as their second choice. Other speakers in his behalf came from Illinois and Kansas, Arkansas—to which Missouri yielded in her turn—Texas, and Utah. Matthews of Indiana, Blackburn of Kentucky, and McLean of Ohio each found proposers and seconders a-plenty; and Bryan was put forward by several delegates as their preference, almost invariably with some phrase like "the silver-tongued orator," "eloquent as Clay," "a new Cicero," eulogistic of his gift of oral expression, and harking back to the effect produced by his speech of the afternoon.

The one sensational feature of the evening occurred when the name of Horace Boies, of Iowa, was sprung upon the assemblage. Boies, with his extreme views on both greenbacks and silver, had so far out-Bryaned Bryan that many of his friends believed he might yet capture the nomination. Mr. White, of his delegation, had presented his claims in a very clever speech which had drawn forth many plaudits, when a young woman seated in a gallery at the east end of the hall rose and threw herself forward with shrill cries of "Boies! Boies! Boies! Hurrah for Boies! Horace Boies! Horace Boies!" Her girlish figure, clad in white, stood out sharply against its darker background, and she swung her hat as she shouted, letting her hair go as it would.

A few Iowans recognized their opportunity, and, running up to the gallery, escorted her down to the floor. By this time the contagion of her excitement had spread, and when she snatched the Iowa banner from the hand of a man who had brought it forward and started with it on a march through the hall, followed by the male supporters of her candidate and several standard-bearers from other states, a big procession soon formed. As up and down the aisles it marched, shouting the name of Boies, and fairly drowning out the quickstep the musicians were struggling to play for its benefit, there flashed into a thousand minds at once a suggestion of the Maid of Orleans, and every one was on the qui vive to learn the identity of this modern Jeanne. She proved to be Miss Minnie Murray, of Nashua, Iowa, an enthusiast for the nomination of the only governor the democrats of her state had been able to elect since the civil war.

It was a scene which nobody who witnessed it will ever forget, and the only one in the course of the convention which rivaled the demonstration over the cross-of-gold speech. But, like all the other outbursts, it spent itself presently; and the regular proceedings, rendered pitifully tame by contrast, were resumed. The most notable feature of the evening, aside from the Boies incident, was the withdrawal of the names of several men whose candidacy had been previously announced in the press, because they did not care to be nominated on such a platform as the convention had adopted. Shortly before midnight the meeting broke up, and the discussion of men and measures was transferred from the convention hall to the hotel lobbies.

Next morning, when the fourth day's session opened, some of the states offered belated nominating speeches, and the balloting for a presidential candidate began.

There were five ballots, or, more accurately, four ballots and a riot. Bland led through the first three, with Bryan following close. On the fourth, Bryan, who had been steadily gaining, shot ahead of Bland. Under the two-thirds rule, 512 votes were necessary to a choice, and Bryan had corraled 280 to Bland's 241. Thereupon the combined opposition to Bryan began to go down like a row of bricks stood on end. Kentucky led off by changing her twenty-six votes from Blackburn to Bryan; Ohio followed with the transfer of forty-six from McLean to Bryan; next came Iowa, withdrawing Boies and throwing twenty-six for Bryan; and into line fell promptly Arkansas, Montana, Indiana, Texas, and all except six of the other states and territories with full or split delegations, utterly regardless of alphabetical order. Amid a deafening tumult, the tally clerks managed to foot 652 votes to Bryan's credit, and a motion was made that his nomination be declared unanimous. The chair announced that it was carried, wholly ignoring the protests of the few conservatives who had consented to vote at all since the adoption of the platform.

July 11 was the fifth and last day of the convention. What struck every observer most at the outset was the thinness of the attendance. More than two hundred and fifty delegates had started for home, or asked to be excused from voting. I had borrowed the badge of an absentee and went into the body of the hall, where I strolled quietly from delegation to delegation, conversing in a casual way with anybody I found sociably inclined. It was a worried-looking group of men. The life seemed suddenly to have gone out of the whole gathering. All I could think of was the reaction I had occasionally witnessed in a band of convivial spirits on the morning after a "grand good time."

I would remark to a man: "Well, we did a big day's work yesterday!"

And he would answer, after a significant little pause: "Yes, I reckon Mr. Bryan will get a right smart vote;" or, "They tell me Bryan will carry the west;" or, "Bryan's a speaker—if they'll only let him stump the country;" or, "I'd rather have had Bland, but I guess Bryan will put up a good enough fight." In nearly every response there was that indescribable note of reserve which you are fairly sure of drawing from a man who is not quite steady after a shock, but is bound to make the best of things. Here and there I would find a delegate who had been friendly to Bryan from the hour he