

Mr. Bryan Before the Union League of Chicago

At the annual meeting of the Union League Club of Chicago, Judge William H. McSurely, the incoming president, introducing Mr. Bryan, said:

"I am about to introduce to you the best introduced man in America. Of course I am not referring to this particular occasion (laughter); but he is the best introduced man in America because he introduced himself to every state, county and township, to every hamlet, village and plain, mountainside, valley, river, cross-roads—"

Colonel Bryan: "Swamp."

President McSurely: "And swamp. (Laughter.) And, sometimes he has taken to the woods, also. (Renewed laughter.) I believe within the last twelve months our distinguished guest took it upon himself to introduce to the people of America a new president; (applause) and when he undertook to do that he succeeded—this time. (Laughter and applause.) And gentlemen, I speak only what you all know, that in introducing the man that now sits in the White House he introduced one of the most winning, attractive and scholarly personalities that has ever sat in that high and honored position. (Applause.)"

"Our honored guest has not only introduced men, but perhaps of more importance, he has introduced ideas. Some of them we did not like or at least they disturbed our complacency, and we commenced to examine the reasons for the faith that was in us, and I am not so sure but what when we commenced to examine those reasons we were still more disturbed. I know that it is a true and plain historical fact that this wonderful revolutionary change in the ideas and thought of American citizens has been brought about largely by our distinguished guest of the evening. (Applause.)"

"That man will speak to us tonight on 'The Signs of the Times.' Gentlemen, I have the honor to present to you the distinguished secretary of state and the great American citizen, William Jennings Bryan."

The members and guests rose and cheered Colonel Bryan.

Hon. William Jennings Bryan: "Mr. President, and Gentlemen of the Club: I appreciate both the invitation and persistence of those who extended the invitation. I am not sure that I have ever had a more persistent crowd inviting me than those who form your invitation committee. I could not come at the time when I was first invited, but I am glad that circumstances were such that I could be here tonight."

"I was here nineteen years ago. I inquired at the table if any were present tonight who were present then and I found that the two to my right were here, and one of them suggested that he thought half of the persons here tonight had been here then. I thought that that showed that they were willing to take great risks after having heard me once, and that it showed also a very stable membership in this club."

"I certainly appreciate the honor of being here at this time. I am not surprised to find that your election went along so smoothly here. I attended a convention in this city last June (laughter), and I found how an orderly body could proceed (laughter). I don't know whether the opposition to these members, these men elected, was absent or simply put out of the hall, but certainly it was a very unanimous affair here tonight. I was interested, too, in witnessing this transfer of authority. Why, you pass from one administration to another as calmly as they did at Washington the other day. I was very much impressed by the manner in which ninety millions of people changed their executive officer, and I think it must have been a lesson to all who had the privilege of witnessing it. I appreciate too, the kind words that have been spoken in presenting me to you. I am not willing to admit as much credit as has been given to me. When I am introduced as one who introduced a president to this country I think I owe it to history to say that the republican party, by dividing, exerted more influence than I did. (Laughter.) I did what I could to secure a change of the administration, but I confess myself of very little importance compared with the other forces which were operating at the time. I have tried in politics to give credit to my political opponents, and where I have had personal opponents or where I have been personally opposed as a candidate to republicans, I have been very glad to be able to testify to the high character of the men

who defeated me. Possibly I am not unselfish in that. It is bad enough to be defeated by a good man (laughter.) And I have, especially in the last few months, been anxious to improve every opportunity to testify to my appreciation of the deep convictions of the republican candidates in the last election. I admire them for the depth of their conviction, and I hope I may live to see many occasions yet where republicans with convictions as deep will have the courage to make them known. (Laughter.)"

"Insofar as I have had any part in the election of a democratic president I am very proud of that part, and I am very well pleased with the manner in which that president has commenced his administration. (Applause.) I can say that with one exception his cabinet is made up of splendid men (laughter). In making that one exception I do it without any feeling that I am reflecting upon the cabinet, because even the sacred gold dollar has ten per cent of alloy—why then should they expect a cabinet to be pure gold? (Laughter.)"

"I have been given credit, too, for having had a larger part than I would attempt to claim in procuring the conditions that we now all recognize. I admit that I did what I could to support reforms that are now more popular than they were, and if I am pressed to it I will admit that nobody is having a better time just now than I am. (Laughter.)"

"Sometimes I have had over-sanguine friends express regret that I did not reach the presidency. I have had them say that they were sorry that after being connected with these reforms I should not have been given the highest place in the nation. But I have had an answer ready for them. I have told them that they need not weep for me; that I am not an object of sympathy; that two or three hundred years ago they hung men like me; now, they just defeat them for office. (Laughter.) And, looking back over the past I am not prepared to say that my defeats were not good for the country. Not that I want to take back anything I have said, or any position that I have taken, but the people were not ready then for the reforms that are now accomplished, and had I been elected at any of the numerous times that I gave the people an opportunity to elect me (laughter)—had I been elected—I would have had a very difficult task. I would have had people who were honestly and sincerely afraid of the things I stood for. Especially would that have been true in 1896. Had I been elected in 1896 I could not have hoped to have had both the senate and the house with me, and if I had been elected in 1900 I could hardly have hoped to have had the senate and house with me, and even if I had been elected in 1908, many people who today are heartily in favor of the reforms that the people are securing, were then timid and timorous about those questions."

"Today we have the people ripe for reform—and I am not sure that our president may not be able to do what I might not have been able to do had I been elected instead of him. But it is not a question that we need discuss, and one that does not concern me, for I have been so much more interested in the securing of the things for which we have been fighting than I have been in the name of the man who held the office, that I am happy in the thought that this government, through these reforms will be made so good that a citizen will not miss a little thing like the presidency. (Applause.)"

"Of this I am sure that we could not have in the White House a man more consecrated to the people's cause than the one who is now our chief executive. (Applause.) And I have been at his side long enough to feel sure that if I had been allowed to select I could not have selected a man with whom I could work with more real enjoyment, with more sympathy or more hearty co-operation."

"In taking as my subject tonight the 'Signs of the Times,' I thought that I might bring to your attention the general progress of the world, and not only point out the things that have been accomplished, but the direction in which the people are going. And I feel that if I do attempt to speak of the future I will have more willing hearers now than I had some two decades ago, for the things accomplished have enabled us to measure the tendencies of the times. And this subject has been selected and the line of thought has been adopted for a double purpose. It is to encourage those who have been laboring in behalf of reforms, and

to excite to activity those who have not been active."

"And when I say reforms, let no one think that I have any thought of confining my remarks to political reforms. Some people are prejudiced against the word 'reform,' and against the term 'reformer.' I would define reform as change for the better; and I would define a reformer as one who is trying to improve conditions. And when I thus define the terms reform and reformer I think I can assume that you are all reformers."

"But for fear there may be some who yet are disinclined to be classed with the reformers, let me tell you who are not reformers, that events will yet drive you into the ranks of the reformers by the process of elimination."

"I only know of three kinds of people who are not reformers. In the first class you will find those who lack intelligence. Those who do not know that things can be better than they are. If you have any in this community who do not know that there are wrongs to be righted and abuses to be remedied, they belong to this first class and are not reformers; because one can not be a reformer until he has come to understand that there is a possibility of improvement. But you can not have many of these in a club like this, and if you have any they would not be here tonight."

"In the second class you will find those who know reform is possible but who are so hard-hearted and indifferent to the welfare of their fellows that they do not care to have those reforms secured. You can not have any of this class in a club like this; and if you had any they would not be here tonight."

"There is only one other class, and in that you find those who profit by abuses that ought to be reformed and who, therefore, have a pecuniary interest not only in not supporting reforms, but in preventing reforms. Those who have their hands in other people's pockets and do not want to be disturbed. But you can not have very many of this class even in this city, and if you have any it is only polite to assume that they are not here tonight."

"I shall begin, therefore, with the assumption that all of you are interested in some reforms, if not in many, and feel a certain degree of enthusiasm in regard to their accomplishment."

"But the reformer has many difficulties to encounter. I shall not attempt to enumerate them. I shall only mention two. The first is the difference in the degree of enthusiasm among reformers. Reformers vary all the way from just above freezing up to boiling point. (Laughter.) If a reformer is just above freezing you have to handle him very tenderly, for a little creep in the temperature and he is out of the class. But when he is at boiling point he is at work, and one of the chief objects in discussing reform is to raise the temperature. It is much easier to increase the zeal of one who favors a reform than it is to convert to a reform one who is really against it."

"But the second difficulty is even greater. It is the difficulty in getting reformers to act together. Because a reformer is honest he is apt to be obstinate; and because he is conscious that he is disinterested he is not prone to compromise. No one who has ever tried to get reformers together and keep them together will fail to appreciate a story that I have heard in an illustration given by a Kansas congressman some twenty years ago. He said that upon the plains of Brazil there were some little burros that ran wild, and when they were attacked by ferocious animals they would put their heads together and their heels out in a circle and kick the enemy. But he said unfortunately reformers did not always act with that intelligence. (Laughter.) That sometimes in the presence of danger they would put their heads to the enemy and kick each other. (Renewed laughter.) It is a very apt illustration."

"I have known men, and the best men, too, who were so interested in some one reform that they would help to bring about no other reform. And I have known some, and honest men, too, who, when they thought they had found a panacea and others would not accept it, they not only refused to participate in what they called minor reforms, but they would even desire that conditions might get worse and worse; even help them to get worse in the hope that the people would at last, in desperation, be driven to accept something that they now rejected."

"I am not willing to indorse this philosophy. I am not willing to help make any condition worse, no matter how sure I may feel that out of that worse condition good may finally come. I am restrained by the fear that if I helped to