

Mr. Bryan's Position

A Southern Editor's View of War and Peace

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[Mr. George Fort Milton is one of the best representatives of the vigorous southern journalism of the present day. His views as expressed in this article are his own, as are those of our other contributors, and are not printed here as setting forth the editorial views of this periodical. Mr. Milton is the editor and publisher of the Chattanooga (Tenn.) News, and is one of the leading figures in the democratic party of his state. He has been a delegate to several national democratic conventions, and voted for Wilson on every ballot in the Baltimore convention of 1912. He was an officer in the Spanish-American war, is interested in educational affairs, and has written much about the present great war for his own newspaper. He has undoubtedly a wide understanding of public opinion in the south and portions of the west. He is one of many able and typical men educated at the University of the South (Sewanee, Tenn.)—Editor, American Review of Reviews.]

Mr. Bryan's resignation from the office of secretary of state, like many other incidents of his remarkable career, furnished the signal for a chorus of newspaper attacks on him. Probably nine-tenths of these showed lamentable lack of appreciation of his reasons and ignorance of the international situation. Many editors discovered the incident an opportunity to belabor a political leader whom they had been fighting since he first appeared in politics, and even in a grave crisis such as the country faced they could not resist the temptation to wreak petty political revenge on their adversary, who they thought at last had been discomfited.

But even some of Mr. Bryan's best friends also jumped to unwarrantable conclusions and wore sorrowful countenances, such as are observed at political funerals.

Now, however, that more than a month has elapsed it is more easily possible to reach a viewpoint from which a correct perspective of the incident may be secured.

MR. BRYAN'S SO-CALLED "MISTAKES"

Indeed caution may always be properly exercised before pronouncing adversely on acts of Mr. Bryan, for so often those at first catalogued as mistakes have proven otherwise.

For instance, the quantitative theory of money which he defended in 1896 is written into the currency law of 1914.

His campaign against imperialism in 1900 is bearing fruit in the pledge of the present administration for the independence of the Philippines.

In 1908 he advocated railroad rate regulation, but predicted that government ownership of railroad and telegraph lines probably would be necessary. It is likely this frankness lost him the presidency, but the government is now building a railroad in Alaska and also favors the purchase of telegraph and telephone lines.

Against intense opposition he secured the adoption of constitutional amendments for the income tax and for popular election of senators.

Incident to his course at the Baltimore national democratic convention he was denounced as unwise, a party disorganizer, and general nuisance. This was because he opposed Judge Parker for chairman, favored a resolution directed against Ryan, Belmont, and Murphy, and insisted that Tammany should not control the nomination of a candidate. Feeling ran high against him, but when the country had been heard from the delegates fell into line for what Mr. Bryan favored and a golden era of progressive democracy became possible.

So, experience has very clearly shown that it will not do hastily to class one of Mr. Bryan's often surprising and sometimes radical acts as that of an unsafe leader. Although at times he has been in error, more often he has proved right and his courage and leadership for new things have been of incalculable value.

HIS AID TO THE ADMINISTRATION

No one, in fact, experienced greater change of view regarding Mr. Bryan than the president himself. Once he wished him "knocked into a cocked hat." As time went on, however, the views of the two men approached more closely and each came to have appreciation of the services the

other was rendering. Unquestionably the Nebraskan, more than any other public leader, produced the great political revolution in the country which found its expression finally in the Baltimore platform. There were strong reactionary elements in both parties and at Chicago they controlled, but at the democratic gathering they were completely beaten. Mr. Wilson was nominated not only on account of his worth, but also because he had declined to permit "the interests" to finance his campaign and shared Mr. Bryan's views as to the impropriety of selecting Judge Parker for chairman. The democratic party will go to the country next year for its verdict of approval or disapproval, depending on the record made in accordance with platform pledges, and that the record is good is due to a large extent to the loyal assistance given Mr. Bryan while the president's premier. The two men evidently were sincere in their expressions of mutual esteem when they parted and no more severe blow could be struck the democratic party than that the marplots should succeed in producing a breach between them.

WHY HE RESIGNED

From personal acquaintance with Mr. Bryan and study of his life and character I venture to assign as the principal reasons for his resignation the following:

Our country had established, in the thirty treaties negotiated with foreign countries the principle which in his opinion should govern in our affairs with Germany,—that is, that there should be a period of delay and investigation before final action. Germany had accepted the principle as embodied in the thirty treaties and suggested arbitration. We would have been compelled to follow this course if the representations had been with Great Britain, which country had ratified one of the treaties.

But despite the difference of opinion with his chief I am nevertheless inclined to the belief that Mr. Bryan would have found some way to conciliate these differences, as undoubtedly he did with the first note, but for the fact that he felt the press of the country was rapidly rushing us into war and that, therefore, it was necessary for him to meet this menace and by obtaining the ear of the nation offset the influence of this jingo publicity. In the July number of this Review the editor discusses intelligently and none too harshly the sensational manner in which the newspapers, especially the metropolitan press, at that time were promoting their war propaganda. The record makes an ugly page in the history of American journalism.

Before leaving the cabinet Mr. Bryan secured considerable modification of the second note. But we were still traveling the ultimatum route and there was a bellicose feeling apparent in both countries. He could see but one result. If the people were not in some way reached and their sentiments for peace aroused and expressed there would be war. He determined, therefore, at whatever cost to throw himself into the breach. The result was anti-climax. Probably Mr. Bryan himself did not foresee just what would be the immediate effect. What did happen was this: Immediately Mr. Bryan became the target, instead of the Kaiser. There was another head to hit. They hit it. As many shillalaha's were raised as at the famed Donnybrook fair. Also our German-American friends were given pause. They were astounded that any father-in-law of a British officer could be neutral. They began to apologize, saying they might be mistaken as to the president also. Their kinsmen across the water also became more polite. Soon it was evident that a peaceful solution of the Lusitania incident was likely.

Following Germany's reply to our second note there was a slight flare-up of the jingo spirit in the press; but a number of very influential papers were more conservative than in the case of the first note and even the most immoderate, with not many exceptions, calmed down in a few days. The astonishing news was carried under a Washington date line shortly afterward that the new secretary of state and the German ambassador were considering mediation,—Mr. Bryan's views prevailing again.

As a private citizen Mr. Bryan occupies the position in which he always has been and now again is of greater service to the country. His immediate work before the nation and the world

is to make something more than "scraps of paper" out of the treaties he has negotiated, and on which history will judge his career as secretary of state. There must be a sentiment behind these treaties or in case of any incident affecting the national honor in public opinion the prediction of Mr. Roosevelt will come true and no attention will be paid to them. It is true we had no such treaty with Germany, but that country had accepted the principle, and again proposed to abide by it. If we are bound by solemn treaties to arbitrate with any one of thirty countries of the world, how may we consistently refuse similar peaceful conciliation between a friendly country and ourselves, even if no treaty actually has been signed?

AMERICAN SYMPTOMS OF WAR FEVER

One reason for the change in public view—and the main reason,—is that we are being tremendously influenced by what is going on abroad. As gladiatorial spectacles made Rome callous to suffering so we may not, without becoming more or less indifferent and brutalized, look on these life-and-death struggles which are making shambles of the war zones of Europe. Unconsciously also we are adopting the military point of view and theories formerly held are now dubbed Utopian. We are exhibiting some of the symptoms of that hysteria which frightened each of the countries with the belief that it was about to be attacked by the enemy, and caused it to redouble preparations for national defense so that when the day of ultimatums came each was so confident of strength and the cataclysm was certain. All of this plays into the hands of our own military party, and such thoughts, of course, are selfishly encouraged by makers of ammunition and other munitions of war, ship-builders, rifle-makers, aeroplane and submarine constructors and by all the many interests which expect in one way or another to profit financially by war.

Our observations of the scenes abroad, too, have swayed us from neutrality and aroused prejudices old or new.

Language, of course, is the strongest of influences. Nearly all our people read English only. The history and literature in that language are accessible to every fairly well educated person. In addition the laws, customs, social and religious influences of the Anglo-Saxon are strong with us. The larger proportion of our foreign commerce is with countries under the British flag and English capital in immense sums has been invested here. So we have absorbed from English writers their views of history and politics and the reason they assign for the war and their reports of its progress.

The German military machine is held up before us as the juggernaut crushing civilization while the British naval machine, even though denying us the freedom of the seas, is described as almost a beneficent institution and an instrument for the fulfillment of Anglo-Saxon destiny.

Therefore, not even on the Fourth of July do we any longer twist the lion's tail and there are some presumably patriotic citizens who look with no disfavor on the possible actual union of the two countries.

As for the actual events of the conflict to date, the situation even more strongly tends to misconception. We are informed of only what the London censor allows to pass his blue pencil. Even German official dispatches are edited in London. When we add to the above the fact that the average American newspaper reader gets his information only from the headlines written over these mutilated dispatches we may know how likely public opinion on the subject may be ignorant or prejudiced.

Nor did Teutonic behavior improve the situation. The German press was bitter and untactful. So at the time the Lusitania was sunk our minds were almost without recollection that we were committed to the principle of arbitration; and we were as restless under such suggestion as was Austria-Hungary when the Archduke and consort were killed.

All of which may well justify the query, Is there any assurance that the psychological influences which make ready for war will not attack us even more alarmingly?

ONE-SIDED INFORMATION

It is as difficult for us to get our facts straight as it is for those people each of whom is shedding its blood and giving its treasure, in every case contending that they fight for national preservation. Austria characterizes the dastardly crime at Serajevo as part of the Pan-Serbian program. The Entente powers charge that Bernhardt's bloody counsel finally had won. The