

A Young Man's Ambition

(Written by Mr. Bryan for the Circle Magazine)

Editor the Circle: You ask for an article describing "the incidents or event, or turn of events which moulded" my ambition, etc. My first ambition was to be a Baptist preacher. My father was a Baptist and when I was four or five years old I would answer that I was "going to be a Baptist preacher" whenever anyone inquired about my plans. It is a tradition in our family that my father took me to see an immersion about that time, and that upon my return home I asked him if it would be necessary to go down into a pool of water to be a Baptist preacher. He replied that it would, and according to the memory of the family, the fear of that pool of water turned my thoughts to agriculture, and I was "going to be a farmer and raise pumpkins." That ambition, however, was short lived, for before I was six years old I had made another change and was "going to be a lawyer." My father was a lawyer and was at that time on the circuit bench, and I would as a boy visit the court house and listen to the trial of cases. The ambition to be a lawyer guided me through my boyhood and through my college days. I studied law, was admitted to the bar and practiced for four years in Illinois. I removed to Nebraska in 1887 and practiced for about four years in Nebraska before politics suspended my law business.

When I was twelve my father was a candidate for congress, being defeated by two hundred and forty majority in the Greeley campaign of 1872. It was about that time that I began to interest myself in politics, but it was always with the idea of making my fortune in the law first, and then entering upon a political career. A seat in the senate was the position that attracted me most. I did not consider a congressional career or the presidency, but enjoyed taking part in debating societies, and two of these societies were organized as senates. At one time I represented Delaware, and at another time Illinois.

I entered Whipple Academy, the preparatory department of Illinois College, in the fall of 1875, at the age of fifteen, and attended the intercollegiate contest, held that year at Jacksonville. I there conceived the idea of representing the college when I became a senior. It was in furtherance of this ambition that I entered three declamation contests, standing well down the list in the first, getting third place in the second, and winning the second prize in the third. As a sophomore I won the first prize in essay and, as a junior, the first prize in oratory. The junior prize gave me the honor that I coveted, and I represented Illinois College in the intercollegiate contest, held that year (1880) at Galesburg, and was awarded the second prize.

I was elected class orator by my associates, besides winning valedictory on my marks. I need hardly add that during the two years in the academy, four years in college and two years in law school I was a regular attendant at the meetings of literary and debating societies, giving special attention to oratory and debating.

At Jacksonville I boarded for six years with Dr. H. K. Jones and wife, distant relatives, and the environment of this home was very helpful to me.

In law school I was especially interested in constitutional law. My graduating thesis was on the jury system. I am indebted to Ex-Senator Lyman Trumbull for the wholesome influence thrown around me in his office.

I took up the practice of the law with enthusiasm. When I decided to remove to Nebraska in the fall of 1887, it was with no thought of entering politics immediately. All of the reasons that took me to Nebraska were professional ones; in fact, at that time Nebraska was so strongly republican that political reasons would not have led a democrat to select the state as a place of residence.

Although I had commenced making political speeches when I was twenty and had taken an increasing interest in the campaigns that followed, my political career began in 1890 when I was nominated for congress, practically without opposition. For the benefit of those who may read this article, I ought to say that circumstances have a great deal to do with political success. Had I remained in Illinois it is not likely that I would have had an opportunity to enter congress as soon as I did, and even in Nebraska I would hardly have been nominated had I lived in a democratic district. My youth and my short residence in the state would have weighed against me in a democratic dis-

trict, but as the district in which I located was strongly republican and as no other democrat seemed to desire the nomination, it came to me by default.

Fortune not only favored me in securing the nomination, but it favored me still more on election day, for 1890 was the year of the great democratic landslide and many districts presented surprises. I was not only elected, but elected by a majority of 6,700.

When I reached Washington circumstances again favored me. Congressman Springer, in whose district I resided when in Illinois, was a candidate for speaker, and as I had campaigned for him twice and knew him personally, I supported him not only with pleasure, but with earnestness. He was made chairman of the ways and means committee by Speaker Crisp, and through his influence with Speaker Crisp, I secured a place upon the ways and means committee. This gave me an opportunity to take a leading part in the fight on the tariff question and this, in turn, made my re-election possible. When I saw that the money question was likely to be the issue, I purchased books and studied the subject so that I was ready when it became the paramount issue.

In 1894 I was nominated for the United States senate, and it looked as if the ambition of my boyhood was about to be realized, but I went down in the republican landslide of that year—circumstances again controlling. From the standpoint of merit I was more deserving of success in 1894 than in 1890. I need not refer to the events that followed; it would be beyond the scope of the subject about which you inquire.

To recapitulate: The ambition to enter public life had something to do with the ambition to excel in public speaking, although I expected to make use of my experience as an advocate in court before I used it in any public assembly. That ambition also led me to work diligently, and the work has been useful to me in many ways. Second, I have been impressed with the fact that circumstances are an important factor in a man's life, especially in public life. A multitude of circumstances have conspired to mould my life and to affect my plans, and I doubt not that the same is true of others. The place of residence cuts a figure, as do also the trend of events and the action of others. In fact, political success might be described as the conjunction of preparation and opportunity; without opportunity one can not use his preparation, and without preparation the opportunity passes unimproved.

I have only referred to the event that led up to the presidential nomination. If I were called upon to enumerate the influences which have, in a broader sense, entered into my life work, I could not overlook the fact that at the age of fourteen I became a member of the church and the religious convictions which have controlled my life have had as much to do with my political career as my political principles have. In fact, the ethical element in life is the basic element and it is difficult to place too large an estimate upon the influence which it exerts.

My father, mother and wife have exerted a very perceptible influence also. My father was thoroughly democratic in conduct as well as in thought, and though he died when I was only twenty, I had been deeply impressed by his views. His "faith in the wisdom of doing right" has always been an inspiration to me. He used to tell me that I could afford to be in the minority, but that I could not afford to be wrong on any question—that if I was in the minority and right, I would some day be in the majority, but that if I was in the majority and wrong, I would some day be in the minority. This confidence in the ultimate triumph of truth has been worth more to me than any fortune he could have left me.

My mother taught me at home until I was ten years old and trained me to recite pieces. Sometimes she would have me stand on a little table and declaim my lessons, questions and answers. She rather discouraged my political ambitions after my father's defeat, but she was quite proud of my success when I was elected to congress and was confidently expecting my nomination at the convention of 1896, which assembled a week after her death. Knowing how she would have rejoiced in my election I was glad that Mr. McKinley's mother lived long enough to see her devoted son in the White House. Mother's advice, "Never do anything that you would be ashamed to have known," has been very helpful to me.

I can not overlook, either, the influence of marriage. I became engaged at twenty and was married at twenty-four—"Won 1880, one 1884,

is the inscription in the wedding ring with which I endowed her with my scanty worldly goods. She has been a real helpmeet and while never urging me into politics has borne her full share of the burdens. Had she had poor health, been of a different disposition or proven herself unequal to the responsibilities of public life—my plans might have been materially changed. Here, too, I have had reason to be grateful.

W. J. BRYAN.

BRANDING THE REAL ONES

In his speech at Winona, Minn., President Taft plainly branded the standpatters as the "real republicans" and now comes Speaker Cannon and boldly reads out of the party Senator Cummins and his associates. Speaking before the Illinois mayors' association, Mr. Cannon said:

"I was over in Iowa last week, and found that it is an open secret there that Senator Cummins not only proposes to join hands with Bryan but he says that the agitation will not stop and that he will appeal to the people until the tariff is revised according to his notions. In this campaign to be waged by Senator Cummins the issue appears to be whether the seven senators and the twenty members of the house who voted against the tariff bill constitute the republican party, or whether the majority of the republican members of congress and the president make up the republican party. These people under the leadership of Senators Cummins and LaFollette call themselves republicans, but if they are, then I am something else."

There you have it blunt and plain. The speaker might have gone farther and said: "If these people under the leadership of Cummins and LaFollette are republicans then Aldrich and Cannon and Taft are something else." It seems, however, that Aldrich, Cannon and Taft are in the saddle—and the biggest of these is Aldrich.

"THE WORM TURNS"

Mr. George H. Allen, of the Cedarline Allen Company, Clinton, New York, commonly known as "Cedarline Allen," has published and is circulating a little pamphlet entitled, "I Am Reminded." Mr. Allen is a republican and boasts of having voted for Mr. Garfield and every republican president since, but he does not like the manner in which the republican party buncoed the country on the tariff question last fall. The illustrated pamphlet which he has sent The Commoner does not mention any price, and it is probable that it will be sent to any reader upon application—at least a postal card might be risked. It is good material to show to those republicans who voted the republican ticket with the understanding that the tariff was to be reduced. It is to be hoped that Mr. Allen represents a larger group, for certainly there has been enough fraud practiced to arouse the ire of tariff reform republicans.

HEAVEN

"What do you think that heaven may be?"

The hearer answered with a smile:
"A place where folks like you and me
May hear sweet music all the while,
Where roses bloom and birds will sing
And silver streams plash in the shade,
With naught but joy in everything—
Of these, I know, is heaven made."

"What do you think that heaven may be?"

The mother answered: "'Tis a land
Where all mine own may be with me
And where, too, I may understand
The longings of the little hearts
And find my happiness complete
In soothing with a mother's arts
The weary little hands and feet."

"What do you think that heaven may be?"

The old man answered with a sigh:
"A cot beneath a spreading tree
That towers ever green and high,
And never weariness nor strife
But just a comfort calm and blest
Such as we may not have in life—
A folding of the hands in rest."

What do you think that heaven may be?

Why, it would be of little worth
Were it not given to us to see
Some promise of it here on earth;
If through the moments and the years
We could not bring its radiant glow
To light our smiles and dry the tears
Of the weary folk we know.

—Chicago Evening Post.