

Mr. Bryan says He is not so Lonesome Now as when the Country was Wet

[From The Literary Digest.]

Particularly apropos in these opening days of the great drought which he helped bring about seems a recent interview with William Jennings Bryan, by Fred Lockley, in the Oregon Daily Journal. When Mr. Lockley met Mr. Bryan in Astoria a few days ago, by a rapid association of ideas, it occurred to the newspaper man that this would be the psychological moment for carrying a story about the famous Nebraskan, wherefore he tackled the latter and asked him numerous questions about himself, particularly regarding his early life, thus bringing out several things of which the public has not heretofore been informed. Naturally the subject of prohibition was discussed, and Mr. Bryan confided that he was not so lonesome now as he once was. "I have always been a teetotaler from youth," he said. "Neither Mrs. Bryan nor myself has ever permitted liquor to be served in our home, and now I have come to see the day when liquor can no longer be served in any home." In the course of his remarks, Mr. Bryan suggested that in his opinion the liquor question would eventually reach its "angle of repose" in this country, which expression he thereupon elucidated as follows:

"No question is settled until it reaches its angle of repose. Do you remember what bitter controversy there was over the slavery question? It has reached its angle of repose. You never hear it discussed any more. The same thing is true of the liquor question. We shall no more go back to the day when we shall auction off our boys to the liquor interests than we shall go back to the day when we auctioned off the bodies of black men. Do you remember that verse in the Bible where they sent for Joseph and Mary to come out of Egypt? The messenger said, 'They are dead that sought the young child's life.' Yes, Herod, the slayer of children, was dead, and so today King Alcohol is dead. Where Herod slew his hundreds, King Alcohol has slain his hundreds of thousands. Woman suffrage will also soon reach its angle of repose, for it is now recognized that it is not only a woman's right but her duty to take part in governmental activities and to help make and enforce law.

"There are many questions that must be met and solved. They are questions that require our best efforts to find a wise solution. I can remember when I was considered an anarchist for advocating the income tax and direct election of senators by the people; yet you have no further discussion about those questions. They have reached their angle of repose. Oregon and other progressive states have long ago adopted the initiative and referendum, and soon that, too, will reach its angle of repose and be nationally adopted. Every one will realize that in a democracy all of us should help to form as well as obey the laws."

Of course, Mr. Bryan's goings and comings have been as an open book to the American people for the last twenty-odd years, but less is known of his boyhood and early youth, and Mr. Lockley's main purpose in this interview was to secure some glimpses of that period of "The Commoner's" life, which purpose he made clear by a line of questions as follows:

"What I want to know is about the old swimming-hole where you learned to swim? Did you use to catch channel catfish, or perch, when you were a boy? Did you ever go rabbit-hunting? What was the name of the dog that used to go with you? Who was the first girl you ever went with? Did you plan on being a pirate, or a preacher, when you grew up? I want to know all about your boyhood. Tell me about your father. How did he happen to meet your mother? These are of the kind of things I want to know."

And when the advocate of silver coin in the ratio of 16 to 1 had recovered his breath after this string of queries had been hurled at him he replied:

"Well there was nothing in my boyhood that was different from the boyhood of a million other American boys. My father was a Jeffersonian democrat. He was born in Virginia, near Jefferson's home at Monticello. His parents died when he was fourteen years old and he went to Illinois, where his brothers and sisters had gone

some time before. Father graduated from McKendree College, at Lebanon, Ill. He was an enthusiast on the subject of education. It was while he was teaching school that he met my mother. My mother's name was Maria Elizabeth Jennings. She was born at Walnut Hill, Marion County, Ill. My father was teaching school there to earn money to go to college. She was one of his pupils. They were married at Salem, the county seat of Marion County, Ill. My father was an intensely religious man. He was a member of the Baptist church and was frequently called upon to speak at religious gatherings of that denomination.

"I cannot remember the time when I was not planning to go to college. I was born at Salem on March 19, 1860. My father was judge of the circuit-court and his interest in public life threw the care of the family largely upon my mother. She was a woman of unusual intelligence. My mother and father, like my wife and myself, were comrades, and my mother was in full sympathy with my father religiously, intellectually, and politically. It was the impress of her life on mine that helped largely to mold my character.

In 1872 my father was a candidate for congress. With Greeley he went down to defeat, as did the rest of the democratic candidates. He was defeated by only 240 votes. I was only twelve years old at that time, but I was greatly interested in the campaign. Right then and there I determined to go into politics. As I grew older I planned to enter the law and make a competence before entering politics, but circumstances changed my plans.

"I didn't go to school until I was ten years old. My mother taught me at home. I went through the grammar grades and high school at Salem, Ill., and in the fall of 1875, when I was fifteen, I was sent to Whipple Academy, at Jacksonville, a preparatory school for Illinois college. Two years later I went to Illinois college, where I graduated in 1881. The next two years I spent at the College of Law at Chicago. The law course at that time was a two-year course. I began the practise of law at Jacksonville July 4, 1883."

As might have been expected, Mr. Bryan was most interested in debating and public speaking while in college. He also paid some attention to athletics and won prizes for jumping. As we read:

"Shortly after reaching Jacksonville I was elected to the Sigma Pi, and for the following six years I took a very active interest in it. I was particularly interested in debating. Teachers frequently assign a student the affirmative or the negative side of a question for debate, without regard to whether the student believes in the side of the subject he is to uphold. Personally, I believe this is a mistake. I have always believed it unwise to argue against one's convictions. I myself have always refused to uphold a side in which I did not believe, and I have always advised others to do the same. I think persons suffer a certain moral impairment when they try to make others believe what they themselves do not believe. Unless you have a deep and abiding faith in a cause you cannot impress others with your sincerity.

"I began my public speaking with declamations. I took part in three contests. In the first I was pretty well down the list. In the second I was third, and in the third I was second. In my sophomore year I won the prize for my essay. In my junior year I won the prize for oratory. This gave me the privilege of representing my college in the state oratorical contest. This was in the fall of 1880. In this state oratorical contest I won second place. When I first entered the academy I attended the intercollegiate contest at Jacksonville. Then and there I made up my mind that if it was possible I would represent my college in the state oratorical contest, on or before I reached my senior year. Yes, I think in justice to myself, I can say that I studied hard. I think this is proved by the fact that during the four years in college I led my class, which resulted in my being chosen valedictorian, which resulted in my being chosen valedictorian, which resulted in my being chosen valedictorian.

"In many of the college sports I took but an ordinary interest. Many of the boys could beat me in the one-hundred-yard dash, my best time being eleven seconds. Like most American boys, I played base-ball, but was more or less of an amateur at it. I excelled in only one thing, and

that was the broad jump, or, as it is usually called, the standing jump. When I entered the academy I could jump nine feet in the broad jump. When I graduated my record was twelve feet. Several years after graduation I returned to the college and the students induced me to compete in the broad jump. I won the prize by jumping twelve feet, four inches. In one other event I was always able to take the prize, and that was in the backward jump. I was able to jump nine feet backward. If you think that is easy, try it some time."

Most of Mr. Bryan's childhood was spent on the farm. Of his life there he says:

"We had a creek that ran through our pasture. I remember very distinctly the old swimming-hole in the creek in which I learned to swim. I also remember with a great deal of pleasure bringing home upon rare occasions a ten-inch mudcat. When I could get a mudcat of that size it was a red-letter day. We didn't have trout fishing, as the boys do out here. We caught perch and catfish.

"My one great diversion as a boy was hunting rabbits. Many a time when I was doing the chores in the winter I would get so cold that I wanted to go into the house to get warm, but the sight of a rabbit-track would so interest me that I entirely forgot the cold, and, whistling to my dog, off I would go on the track of the rabbit. I hunted rabbits with a dog long before I could handle a gun. As I became older I became a very successful rabbit-hunter. Occasionally I hunted quail, but somehow or other the quail would always fly between the shot and get away. Of late years most of my hunting has been devoted to hunting ducks. Am I a good duck-hunter? You may judge as to my ability as a duck-hunter when I tell you the only place where the legal limit has ever disturbed me has been on a lake near Galveston, where I hunted ducks as the guest of Colonel Moody.

"You asked me if I am a good swimmer. I am only an ordinary swimmer. When I was young less attention was paid to seeing that boys had a good time than is the case nowadays. Whenever I see an inland community that fixes up an artificial swimming-pool for the boys I rejoice. It seems to me such an expenditure is certainly justified. I believe that now is the proper time to urge upon the people of the nation the importance of a systematic effort in the way of promoting athletic games."

Mr. Bryan gives his wife credit for much of his success in life. She has helped him in his work, and has been an adviser in whose judgment he expresses great confidence. The account continues:

"I met my wife in Jacksonville, while at college. I was boarding with relatives near the Jacksonville Female Academy, at which institution Mary Elizabeth Baird was a student. It was not long before we became acquainted. We became engaged in our junior year. She was the valedictorian of her class, graduating on Wednesday, I was the valedictorian of my class, graduating the following day. When we became engaged I still had to go another year to college before graduation. After finishing college I planned to spend two years at the law school. Then I had to establish a law practice before I could get married. So ours was a rather long engagement. It was four years from the time we were engaged until I was in a position to support a wife. After our marriage my wife studied law and was admitted to the bar. She did this without any thought of practicing law, but so we might have more subjects in common, also that she might help me in my library work.

"When I was thirty years old I was offered the democratic nomination for congress. I was offered it largely because no other democrat wanted it. It was realized that it was next to impossible for a democrat to be elected. The impossible happened, however, and I was elected by a very satisfactory majority. When I entered politics my wife took up the study of political questions. I want to say right here that my wife has not only been my helper in my investigations, but she has been my adviser as well — an adviser in whose judgment I have great confidence. In fact, I know of no other living person in whose judgment I have more confidence on any question than in that of my wife. One of the regrets of my life is that my mother died ten days before I was nominated for the first time for president. It made me glad that Mr. McKinley's mother was alive when he was nominated, for I know with what joy she learned of her son's nomination, just as my nomination would have been a great joy to my mother."