

The Early Life of W. J. Bryan

His Birth, Boyhood and First Years in Law and Politics.



His Birthplace, Salem, Ill.

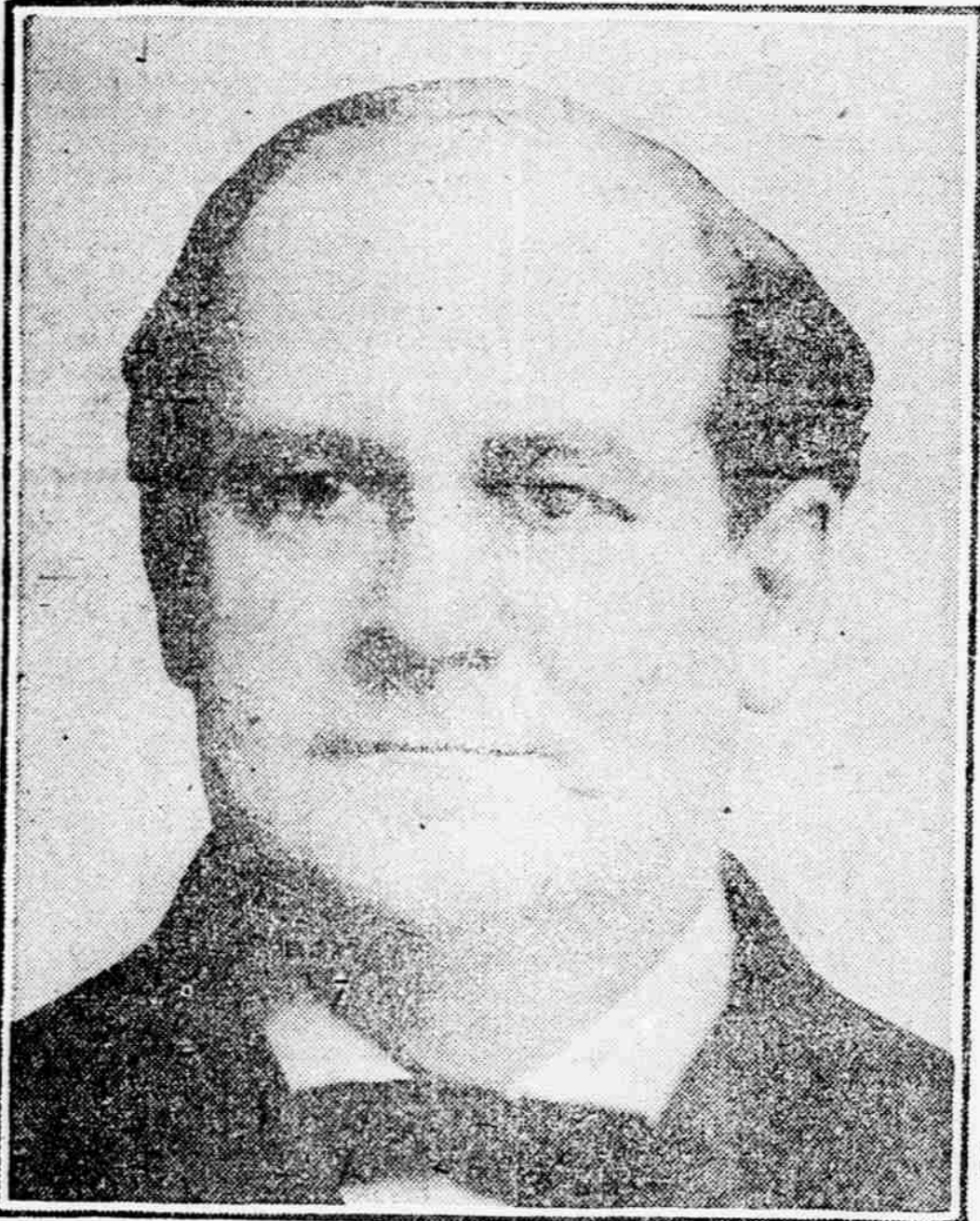
His Creditable Career in Congress and His Work in Journalism

By ROBERTUS LOVE.

He has spoken face to face beyond all question to more hearers than has any other man in the world's history.

The purpose of this article is briefly to sketch the life of Mr. Bryan up to the age of thirty-six, when he was nominated by the Democratic party for the presidency of the United States.

The town of Salem, Ill., is the birthplace of Bryan. Judge Silas L. Bryan, a substantial, intellectual settler from Virginia, was his father. Maria Elizabeth Jennings was his mother's maiden name. The child was born March 19, 1836. Judge Bryan lived on a farm near the edge of town. He had nine children, of whom William Jennings is the fourth. The boy grew up outdoors, drinking the daily medicine of sunshine and the open air. His physical constitution, a marvel of robustness and energy, came by inheritance



WILLIAM J. BRYAN, FROM HIS LATEST PHOTOGRAPH.

and was nurtured by wholesome and healthful environment in boyhood. Bryan attended the public schools in Salem until he was fifteen, when he entered Whipple academy at Jacksonville, Ill. Two years later he matriculated in Illinois college, in the same city, from which institution he was graduated with honors at the age of twenty-one. During his college course his oratorical abilities made him prominent in middle western collegiate life. He won the honor of representing his school in the state contest of college orators. He won that contest and represented Illinois in 1851 at the latest state oratorical contest, held at Galesburg, Ill., where he achieved second honors. He was class orator at graduation.

Jacksonville has a female seminary in that school Miss Mary E. Baird was a student while young Bryan was in Illinois college. She was from Perry, Ill., and was of excellent family and an ambitious student. A bright young man and a bright young woman attending college in the same town sometimes emphasize the aphorism that like attracts like. Perhaps that explains why Bryan, after attending the Union Law college in Chicago and reading law at the same time in the office of Judge Lyman Trumbull, the celebrated associate of Abraham Lincoln, returned to Jacksonville to begin the practice of his profession. Bryan and Miss Baird were married shortly after his return. Mrs. Bryan studied law in order to assist her husband in his professional work. After the Bryans removed to Lincoln, Neb., in 1857 Mrs. Bryan was admitted to the bar. Mr. Bryan became junior partner in the law firm of Talbot & Bryan. He believed there was more opportunity for a rising young lawyer in a new state—belief assuredly well grounded in his own case.

Bryan plunged into politics in the spring of 1858, and that became his life vocation instead of the law. He was elected a delegate to the Democratic state convention at Omaha, where he made a speech strongly advocating free trade; also he made a reputation as a speaker. He was only twenty-eight years old, yet the very next year

the party leaders offered him the nomination for the lieutenant governorship of Nebraska. He declined the offer, but made a stumping campaign for the ticket throughout the state.

The next year, 1860, the young Democracy thrust upon the young Demosthenes from Illinois the nomination for congressman from the first district. J. Sterling Morton, who in his time was father of Arbor day and a member of President Cleveland's cabinet, had been defeated in the race for congress from that district in 1858 by a Republican majority of more than 3,000 votes. Scarcely anybody expected young Bryan to win. He was not so very sanguine himself, but he made an oratorical campaign and defeated Congressman Connell by nearly 7,000 votes. In Omaha, where Connell lived, Bryan was sneered at as "that Lincoln boy." It was the reaction against the new McKinley tariff that elected Bryan—that and the silver tongue of the Lincoln!

So at thirty Bryan was chosen to the national house of representatives. He delivered his first speech in the house the 12th of March, 1862, on the subject of free wool. Senator Burrows of Michigan, temporary chairman of this year's Republican national convention, declared that it was the best speech on the tariff he ever had heard. News-

editorship after a fierce legal fight against the advertising contract. He was nominated for the senate by the unanimous vote of the state convention, despite the fact that many of them disagreed with him on the silver coinage issue. With John M. Thurston, the leading Republican candidate for the senate, Bryan engaged in two joint debates, having challenged Thurston. The forensic duels took place in Lincoln and Omaha. The tariff was the sole topic of discussion. Bryan defended the Wilson tariff, which as a member of the ways and means committee he had helped to create. At Lincoln the enthusiasm was such that Bryan was carried from the platform outside and down into the street, where howling mobs of "overflow" admirers awaited him. Thurston was elected by



MRS. WILLIAM H. LEAVITT.

the legislature. Mr. Bryan remained a private citizen. He had challenged William McKinley also to a joint debate on the tariff, but the Ohio tariff builder declined. Mr. McKinley was destined to meet the Nebraskan in a broader contest a little later.

In the meantime Mr. Bryan was happy at home with his little family, the helpful wife and three children. The children now are grown up. Ruth is Mrs. William H. Leavitt and has made her father a grandfather. William junior is eighteen, and Miss Grace is a budding belle of seventeen years.

Young Mrs. Leavitt herself is something of a politician. She has been elected a delegate to the Democratic state convention in Colorado, her home being in Denver. Young William is a student in the Nebraska State university at Lincoln. Miss Grace, who in the event of her father's election to the presidency will become "the young lady of the White House," is at home with her estimable mother on the Bryan farm near Lincoln, known as "Fairview," where the head of the family some years ago built a handsome residence. Prior to that the family had occupied a modest cottage in Lincoln, where Mr. Bryan returned to his law practice after his unsuccessful campaign for the senatorship.

When in 1866 the Republican convention which nominated McKinley for president met in St. Louis, William J. Bryan held no office whatever. He still had a connection with the Omaha paper, and he went to St. Louis as a press correspondent. At the Planters hotel the clerk looked over the plainly garbed young man who signed "W. J. Bryan" on the register and made him pay in advance. The clerk put Bryan in a room with seven Republicans. Under date of June 24 a correspondent of the New York Tribune sent to his paper from St. Louis this highly interesting paragraph:

Ex-Congressman William J. Bryan, the leader of the free silver wing of the Nebraska Democracy, was one of yesterday's arrivals. The appearance of Mr. Bryan in a hotel corridor in consultation with several Republicans from free silver states of the far west excited much comment. In response to a question concerning his mission Mr. Bryan remarked: "I have nothing to say now except that these gentlemen and I will be found next November voting the same ticket."

Senator Henry M. Teller of Colorado and others were the free silver Republican leaders indicated by the Tribune correspondent. It was an accurate prediction by Mr. Bryan that they would be voting the same ticket with him in November, for they walked out of the Republican national convention when the gold standard platform was adopted and aligned themselves with the free silver Democracy.

But neither the New York correspondent nor the free silver seceders nor the Nebraska correspondent and free silver leader himself could foretell that the seceders would vote for William Jennings Bryan as the presidential candidate on the ticket which was to be nominated at Chicago a few weeks later.



MISS GRACE BRYAN.

Bryan and the Presidency

"Cross of Gold and Crown of Thorns"—How a Wonderful Speech Won a Presidential Nomination.



Mrs. William J. Bryan.

His Renomination in 1900. The Dominant Spirit of the Democracy For Twelve Years. Bryan in 1908

When the Democratic national convention met at Chicago in 1896 one of the delegates from Nebraska was William Jennings Bryan, a young man of thirty-six, a private citizen of the city of Lincoln. His prior political career comprised two terms in congress. He had been his party nominee for a United States senatorship in a Republican legislature.

The national Democracy had broken away from Grover Cleveland, whom it had elected president twice and who was then in office. The split was on the money question. Cleveland had called a special session of congress to repeal the silver bullion purchasing act. The mass of the party stood for the free coinage of silver, chiefly at the ratio of 16 to 1. The Cleveland wing stood for the single gold stand-



WILLIAM J. BRYAN IN 1896.

"You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns. You shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold."

The mighty chasm widened at the convention. Congressman Richard P. Bland of Missouri, "Silver Dick," the old war horse of the free silver coinage movement, was the logical and apparently the inevitable candidate for the presidency. His nomination seemed to be a certainty until a thing happened hitherto unprecedented in American politics.

Bryan of Nebraska, known as "the silver-tongued orator" and "the boy orator of the Platte," mounted the platform and delivered a brief but bold and masterful speech. His vibrant voice rang out over the heads of the 15,000 persons in the vast hall, penetrating with clarion intonation to the farthest corners. The customary uproar of a great political convention, which the strongest of oratorical lungs, as a rule, cannot quell entirely, was hushed into unbreathing awe. No such eloquence ever before had been heard in a national convention. The man and the occasion had met, and the man had mastered the occasion. The address was an impassioned appeal for bimetallicism and an exalted glorification of the new Democratic financial doctrine. When the orator closed with his epoch-making metaphor of "the cross of gold and crown of thorns" the enthusiastic approbation of his sentiments and of the man himself was indicated by a whirlwind of applause beyond description.

And William Jennings Bryan was nominated for the presidency of the United States.

Flushed to the remotest reaches of the nation, the news was the most sensational political tidbit that ever took the wires. Bryan was but one year above the minimum age required by the constitution of the United States for a president. While some of his speeches in congress a few years before had given him a momentary reputation, he was practically unknown to the nation at large, and particularly so to the great eastern section of the country. Never before had a great party nominated for president a man living west of the Mississippi river. Never before had so young a man been nominated. Never before had an orator won the great prize by a single speech. Democrats, Republicans, Populists, everybody wondered how the newcomer would conduct himself in the campaign.

Presently the wonder turned to amazement. Young Mr. Bryan was a campaigner—there was no doubt as to that. He injected into American politics a presidential campaign such as the nation never knew before. Men called it a whirlwind campaign, and such it was. The whirlwind road was the railroad, and it carried the candidate up and down and across the land upon an amazing schedule of traveling and talking. Mr. Bryan traveled in that campaign more than 18,000 miles and delivered considerably more than 2,000 speeches. He made forty-nine speeches in one day in New York state. Thirty-five addresses, short and

long, were delivered by him on several days, while it was an ordinary thing for him to address twenty crowds at twenty different towns in twenty hours. The candidate showed a physique and a voice that stood the tremendous strain with marvelous endurance. As the campaign progressed and the fame of Bryan spread people got to sitting up all night and traveling many miles just to hear the phenomenon speak.

Bryan's first appearance in the east was on the 12th of August, when he delivered his speech of acceptance of the nomination. Madison Square Garden was packed with a suffocating mass of men and women, though it was one of the hottest days ever known in New York and a dozen persons had died from sunstroke during the day. Bryan read that speech from manuscript, a disappointing thing, for it detracted greatly from his eloquence. But the candidate was well aware that great issues hinged upon his utterances on that important occasion, and he did not care to trust himself to the un-urged enthusiasm of the moment.

With Arthur Sewall of Maine, the vice presidential candidate, Bryan went down to defeat at the November election, though he had been nominated also by the Populist party, with Thomas E. Watson of Georgia as the vice presidential candidate on that ticket. McKinley and Hobart went into office, and there were those who predicted that Bryan was forever eliminated from the Democracy.

Four years later at the Democratic national convention in Kansas City Mr. Bryan was renominated by acclamation. There was absolutely no other candidate suggested for the nomination. For vice president Adlai E. Stevenson of Bloomington, Ill., who had been vice president during Cleveland's second term, was named. The war with Spain and our consequent acquisition of the Philippine Islands had brought new issues into politics, but the silver plank was reinserted into the Democratic platform. Mr. Bryan declining to stand for the nomination without it. It was expressly declared



NEW PICTURE OF MR. AND MRS. BRYAN.

in the platform, however, that imperialism was the paramount issue of the campaign. The Democracy opposed the forcible subjugation of the Philippines and the control of the archipelago in the colonial style of the British empire. Mr. Bryan made another whirlwind campaign, even breaking his own record for traveling and speechmaking.



WILLIAM J. BRYAN, JR.

He was forty years of age and in the full flush of magnificent manhood. During the four years since 1896 he had done much political speaking and writing, he had lectured many times on other topics, he had traveled abroad and studied other governments and conditions of people; also he had become Colonel Bryan, having gone to camp during the Spanish war as colonel of a Nebraska regiment.

Again the great east lashed and smashed the western candidate with venomous denunciation, though that time there was a very large increase in personal respect for Mr. Bryan. He had proved himself to be by no means the wild visionary, the amar histic revolutionist, the dangerous fanatic, which the opposition in his own party had pictured him as being in 1896, when the Democracy split open and the lesser section thereof nominated a "gold Democratic" ticket, with General John M. Palmer of Illinois and General Simon B. Buckner of Kentucky as the standard bearers, thus contributing to Bryan's defeat in the first campaign. In the campaign of 1900 the Democratic seceders simply voted the McKinley and Roosevelt Republican ticket.



MR. BRYAN IN THE 1900 CAMPAIGN.

et. A second time Bryan went down to defeat, but gracefully and with good cheer.

He was at his home in Lincoln on election day, ate an early dinner, went upstairs at about 6 o'clock and slept soundly until 11, when he came down and discovered that he was badly beaten. He smiled to the assembled reporters, returned to his bed and slept soundly until morning. It was said by those present that he evinced not the slightest sign of disappointment.

Mr. Bryan did not seek the nomination in 1904. He was quite willing for the disaffected wing of the Democracy to name the ticket just to see if that element could do better than the other. He attended the convention in St. Louis as a delegate, made an amazing fight for a platform upon which he and his supporters could stand and won the fight by sheer force of brain and brawn. He arose from his bed on the early morning of the last day of the convention, though threatened with pneumonia, and just as the dawn was breaking over the city he delivered

in that convention to the vast throng which had waited and sweated and fretted all night long just to hear him a speech which for pathos and power and thrill no inveterate convention follower ever heard equaled. The Democratic ticket, Judge Alton B. Parker of New York and ex-Senator Henry G. Davis of West Virginia, was defeated in November inexpressibly worse than was Bryan in either of his campaigns.

The discovery of vast deposits of gold in Alaska and elsewhere since the free silver campaign has eliminated the money issue from politics. Mr. Bryan has accepted this fact and now stands upon other Democratic issues. Despite all opposition, he has dominated the national Democracy for twelve years. For several years past he has given expression to his views in the weekly journal, the Commoner, which he established at Lincoln. He has removed to a fine farm near Lincoln, built a commodious residence and become known throughout the world as the "great American commoner," titular successor to Henry Clay. He has traveled around the world and written his impressions for a syndicate of American newspapers. He has been for years the most popular and highest paid lecturer on the American lyceum and Chautauqua circuits. It is said that his income from lecturing alone is as much as \$50,000 a year, the president's salary.

Mr. Bryan is a total abstainer from alcohol and tobacco. He is a member of the Presbyterian church and never works on Sunday, save to deliver a religious address now and then. His ideal is morality, personal, political and civic. The Bryan of 1908 looks older than the Bryan of 1896, but he is no less vigorous and virile than he was when his voice flashed across the continent from the Chicago convention hall.