

W. J. BRYAN.

Human nature has made it necessary—and perhaps best—that all over this land two opinions exist about the leader of the minority party in this government. One opinion—that held by his partisans—is this, that William Jennings Bryan had god-like courage and indomitable energy directed by divine wisdom; that he is saintly in self-effacement and heroic in achievement for the poor and oppressed. Another opinion—that held by those who differ with Mr. Bryan about the coinage of silver—is this, that he is an arrant demagogue, vacillating by nature, consciously dishonest, the malicious soul of error, and the fountain head of treasonable doctrines which invite anarchy by the attempt to establish socialism.

Of course, both estimates of Mr. Bryan's character are incorrect—the estimate of his friends as surely as that of his enemies. Nature never made a human being entirely good or entirely bad. Yet, ordinarily, in Presidential years intelligent Americans forget that the habitat of heroes and of villains is in books and plays. Maybe citizens take this unreasonable view of candidates for office because to the popular mind an election is an act in a drama and all the men and women merely players. So it is easy to consider one of the foremost characters in contemporary history, not as a hero or as a villain, but as "a prosperous gentleman," without cherubic wings chafed by his suspenders, and without cloven hoofs under his respectable shoes. Perhaps the direct way to this object is to introduce as "Exhibit A" a few lines descriptive of Mr. Bryan as he appears to the naked eye.

The first impression one receives of the man, and the last impression to fade, is that of youth; not the youth of immaturity; not the youth of mad vanity and folly; but the youth of the bridegroom coming forth from his chamber, rejoicing as a strong man; the youth of hope, of enthusiasm, of bright eyes that indicate a good liver and reflect a brave soul. All the lines of the tall figure that inclose over 200 pounds of wholesome flesh and blood are lines of young manhood. The crescent of his slowly growing vest is the crescent of a young moon, and although Bryan's hair is receding from his brow no wrinkles mark it, and beneath it is a Welsbach smile, clear and steadfast and cheerful as the sunrise. At home, in his office, or in the street, that smile is winning. It is its owner's talisman. But in public life—and Bryan is more natural there than in private life (indeed he has little private life)—in public life that smile is the pyrotechnic obligato for a saxophone voice. Back of the broad chin is a strong jaw; under the jaw a neck, obstinate as a Turk's, slopes into a pair of as diplomatic shoulders as ever saved an

Irishman's head from a blackthorn stick.

Clothe a handsome figure in a black tail coat, and under the awning of a black slouch hat put a low cut vest, with two studs fastened through the front of a white shirt; tie a black string tie, the inevitable neckgear of the young lawyer ten years ago, under a laydown collar; modify the chill atmosphere of the bar by the breezy amiability of a St. Louis shoe drummer, repressed while he sells a Methodist deacon a bill of goods, and the gentle reader may have a fair idea of how Bryan looks, acts, moves, and has his being when he is not before an audience.

In Bryan's book, "The First Battle," his wife has written a short biography of her husband. In this she tells of his boy life; how he did the chores on his father's town farm; how he hunted rabbits; how he "joined church," and decided, as many boys do at some stage of their lives, to become a preacher, and compromised on the bar; how he went to school, and how—this is the first key to his character—"he developed an interest in the work of the literary societies." This debating society business was the youth's stronghold. His wife puts it happily thus: "a prize always fired William's ambition. During his first year in the academy (the preparatory department of Illinois College) he declaimed Patrick Henry's masterpiece, and ranked well down the list. Nothing daunted, the next year found him with the 'Palmetto and the Pine' as his subject. The next year, a freshman in college, he tried for a prize in Latin prose and won half the second prize. Later in the year he declaimed 'Bernardo del Carpio,' and gained second prize. In his second year he entered another contest, with an essay on 'Labor.' This time the first prize rewarded his work. An oration on 'Individual Powers' gave him a place in the intercollegiate contest held at Galesburg, where he ranked second."

Now, if the republicans fancy that they can talk Mr. Bryan down, they may see their mistake in this record. He is only up to "The Palmetto and the Pine" contest this year, with three more contests yet before him. After graduation Bryan went into law, and glided from law to politics with "that mild and healing sympathy" that stole away his practice e'er he was aware. He moved from Jacksonville, Ill., to Lincoln, Neb., and in 1888 he stumped the First Congressional District for J. Sterling Morton. Two years later, he canvassed the district for himself and won. After two terms in Congress, one of which was served on the Ways and Means committee, Bryan came home to find moth and rust corrupting his law books, so he closed them and turned to his true love, "the people." He ran for the United States Senate in '94. When he failed of

election he packed his grip and went forth preaching the silver gospel. He lectured for pay when he could get it, for nothing when he could do no better; but he never stopped talking, and he paid his own way. In the two years preceding '96, Bryan went into nearly every state in the Mississippi valley, and he spoke but one message—the free and unlimited coinage of silver at 16 to 1.

Thus it happened that, when delegates to the National Democratic convention began to rise in the various states, a hundred of them knew Bryan and scores of them had written to him urging him to run for the Presidential nomination.

In the Chicago convention the theorists prevailed. It was clearly the sense of the meeting that man is a creature of the state, rather than that the state is a creation of man. It was preëminently an emotional occasion. The orator who could arouse some one, challenge some one, defy some one else, and plead for something—that orator could best voice the sentiments of his auditors. That orator was Bryan. His magnificent earnestness was hypnotic. Because he lost no force of his eloquence convincing himself, the weight of all his rhetoric, of his splendid magnetic presence, of his resonant voice, fell upon the delegates and filled them with the frenzy that has made every reckless mob of history. Bryan's supremacy in the Chicago convention was as inevitable as Robespierre's in the Assembly. And he did even more than hypnotize the delegates. Through the nerves of the telegraph that speech thrilled a continent, and for a day a nation was in a state of mental and moral catalepsy.

Bryan is deadly serious. From the caverns of his inexperience comes no cackle of mirth at his own presumption, such as invariably comes to a man of ripe philosophy. Bryan sees in his creed the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. With him an expeditious compromise would be a dishonorable surrender. The easy circumstances of his early life, his present environment in the primrose path, his felicitous career following the beckonings of a mastering ambition—these things conspire to persuade him that he is a statesman of destiny. Men who fight their way up from the bottom to the top of fortune's hill are apt to take personal credit for their victories and believe little in the influence of the state. But Bryan's early rise has so confused him that it is natural for him to hold that the state can make or break men. His career makes it proper that he should teach that the state, by proclamation and enactment, can coax the coy millennium out of the roseate dawn and put salt on her tail. For him to hold another view would argue in him a vanity that is foreign to him.

Bryan is distinctly of the old school.