THE DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION.

"Democratic State conventions in several of the Mississippi valley States had declared for free coinage of silver in 1895; but until the spring of 1896 it was not supposed that the sentiment would control the Democratic organization, or the framing of the declaration of principles at its national convention. A free silver organization had, however, been formed within the Democratic party late in 1895, and through its work and that of an organization calling itself the Silver party, a sentiment rapidly developed throughout the South and the West in behalf of silver, and before the election of delegates to the Democratic National Convention had been completed it was apparent that the silver movement would control that convention. (Annual Cycl., 1896, P.667)

"The Democratic National Convention met in Chicago, July 7, 1896. From the first it was apparent that those favoring the free and unlimited coinage of silver at a ratio of sixteen to one would be largely in the ascendancy. The delegates from States east of the Alleghanies were generally opposed to this, many of them favoring a declaration making gold the single standard of value in the national currency. While they recognized the fact that they were in the minority, the fact that the Democratic national conventions since the nomiation of Polk, in 1844, had invariably required a two-third vote to nominate, led them to the hope that they might prevent the nomination of an extreme advocate of free coinage." (Annual Cycl. 1896, 667)

The extent to which class feeling and class struggle would dominate the convention was presaged by the prayer with which the clergyman opened the proceedings, in which he declared: "May the hearts of all be filled with profound respect and sympathy for our toiling multitudes, oppressed with burdens too heavy for them to bear-heavier than we should allow them to bear." (Record of Proceedings, P. 70)

The power of the silverites in the Convention was early shown in a rather striking manner, for, in the face of all precedent, and at the risk of being discourteous to its National Committee, the Convention rejected the latter's nominee for temporary chairman, Senator David B. Hill of New York, and instead chose Senator John W. Daniel of Virginia, who had been recommended by a minority report of the Committee. Hill was a staunch gold man and opponent of the income tax and had been chosen by the old National Committee which had still contained a majority of gold bimetallist members. Daniel, on the other hand, was a strong bimetallist. The latter won over Mr. Hill by a vote of 556 to 349, and when "the result of this vote was announced, there was a period of nearly twenty minutes during which no business could be transacted, on account of the applause, cheers, noise and confusion." Moreover, in the case of contesting delegations from Nebraska and Michigan, the Committee on Credentials reported in favor of seating the silver delegates in both instances, and this recommendation was adopted. It was in this manner that Bryan became a member of the Convention for he had been one of the contesting delegates from Nebraska. Seantor Stepehn M. White of California was then made permanent chairman.

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Senator White's speech of acceptance clearly indicated the class feature of the campaign when he said: "My ambition or yours is of but little moment. Whether I succeed,or you,in impressing sentiments on this convention is not of supreme importance. In this council chamber the Democratic party looks for an indication of its existence. The people seek here the righting of their wrongs,and the Constitution-the great charter of our liberties-here must find its best,its truest and its most loyal defenders. No sectionalism whatever; equal,impartial justice to all in this land; the triumph of the people's cause, as here exemplified and expressed,is the object for which we have assembled,and to carry out that object I will consecrate my best exertions."

"The chief marshal of the silver forces at Chicago was Senator Jones of Arkansas,with Governor Altgeld of Illinois as the most energetic and efficient of his co-workers. It was perceived before the convention assembled that no compromise on any point could be safely considered,and that the silver programme must be put through with a rush,lest the necessary two-thirds majority which the friends of silver seemed to have secured might have its more doubtful members enticed away by the devices of the opposition." (Review of Reviews,Vol.14,P.135)

While Senator Jones and his committee on platform were drawing up their declaration of principles,other members of the convention made speeches,generally in favor of silver. Thus Altgeld said: "We have seen the streets of our cities filled with idle men,hungry men with hungry women,and with ragged children. The country to-day looks to the deliberations of this convention to promise some form of relief." And Senator Blackburn of Kentucky said: "Christ with a lash drove from the temple a better set of men than those who for twenty years have shaped the financial policy of this country." While Governor Hogg of Texas scored the Republicans for their protectionist and big business policies in these words: "This protected class of Republicans proposes now to destroy labor organizations. To that end it has organized syndicates,pools,trusts,and proposes through the Federal courts,in the exercise of their unconstitutional powers by the issuance of extraordinary unconstitutional writs, to strike down,to suppress,and to overawe those organizations, backed by the Federal bayonet.--Men who lived there in their mansions and rolled in luxuries were the only ones to get the benefit of this Republican (sugar) bounty called protection." (Quoted in Beard,Contemp.Amer.Hist.,P.171-172)

The question of the platform caused a long ~~good deal of~~ ~~strong~~ and bitter debate. As finally drawn up,it made the silver question the chief issue,declaring: "We are unalterably opposed to monometallism,which has locked fast the prosperity of an industrial people in the paralysis of hard times. Gold monometallism is a British policy,and its adoption has brought other nations into financial servitude to London.---We demand the free and unlimited coinage of both silver and gold at the present legal

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ratio of sixteen to one without waiting for the aid or consent of any other nation." The platform further denounced the Supreme Court for its decision against the income tax which had been passed "by a Democratic Congress in strict pursuance of the uniform decisions of that Court for nearly a hundred years." The platform went even further and hinted that Congress might do well to reconstruct the Court since it was the "duty of Congress to use all the constitutional power which remains after that decision or which may come from its reversal by the Court, as it may hereafter be constituted, so that the burden of taxation may be equally and impartially laid, to the end that wealth may bear its due proportion of the expense of the government." The platform also demanded a tariff for revenue only, and "so adjusted as to operate equally throughout the country, and not to discriminate between classes or sections," while it called the McKinley tariff "a prolific breeder of trusts and monopolies" which had "enriched the few at the expense of the many."

Moreover, sympathizing with labor, the platform took cognizance of the Chicago labor troubles of 1894 and denounced the "arbitrary interference by Federal authorities in local affairs as a violation of the Constitution of the United States and a crime against free institutions." It furthermore objected to "government by injunction as a new and highly dangerous form of oppression by which Federal judges, in contempt of the laws of the states and the rights of the citizens, become at once legislators, judges, and executioners;" and approved "the bill passed by the last session of the United States Senate, and now pending in the House of Representatives, relative to contempt in Federal courts and providing for trials by jury in certain cases of contempt." Contrary to general practice, Cleveland's administration was not commended for its honesty etc. The minority report of the committee on platform proposed to maintain the existing gold standard and to recognize the "honesty, economy, courage, and fidelity of the present Democratic administration." (Bryan, The First Battle)

The debate on the platform was opened by Senator Tillman, the man who had asked his constituents in South Carolina to elect him to the United States Senate so that he might "stick his pitchfork into (Cleveland's) old ribs." Undisturbed by the frequent hisses which met his words, Tillman insisted that the struggle was a sectional one, the South and West versus the East. He was particularly bitter about Cleveland, calling him the "tool of Wall Street," and the Democrats who would endorse him, "asses and liars." Speaking about the "courage and fidelity" of his administration, Tillman said: "Well, now, no one disputes the man's boldness and obstinacy, because he had the courage to ignore his oath of office, and redeem, in gold, paper obligations of the government, which were payable in coin-both gold and silver, and, furthermore, he had the courage to override the Constitution of the United States and invaded the State of Illinois with the United States army and undertook to override the rights and liberties of his fellow-citizens. They ask us to indorse his fidelity.

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He has been faithful unto death, or rather unto the death of the Democratic party, so far as he represents it, through the policy of the friends that he had in New York and ignored the entire balance of the Union." Senator Jones came next and made a speech in which he denied that the struggle was a sectional one, but of course he upheld the platform as presented by the majority of the committee. Then Senator Hill, who made the main conservative argument, said: "I am a Democrat, but I am not a revolutionist," and proceeded to give a very logical and clear exposition in favor of the gold standard and against the insertion of the income tax plank in the platform. His speech called forth, then, what has been considered one of the most memorable speeches in American history, that of William Jennings Bryan, the thirty-six year old silver delegate from Nebraska.

Bryan was born in Salem, Illinois, on March 19, 1860. "There is a tradition that his appetite, which has since been a constant companion, developed very early. The pockets of his first trousers were always filled with bread, which he kept for an emergency." His father was Silas L. Bryan, "a lawyer of high standing, who had served eight years in the Illinois Senate and was afterward a circuit judge." Bryan graduated from Illinois College in 1881 with honors, "appearing at commencement as the orator of his class, a position that he earned by gaining the second prize in an intercollegiate oratorical contest held at Galesburg while he was a senior. He immediately began the study of law, entering Judge Lyman Trumbull's office in Chicago, and at the same time pursuing the course of the Union Law College." This connection with Trumbull influenced him greatly throughout his life both in his character and his career. He took up his profession in Jacksonville, and then moved to Lincoln, Nebraska, after his marriage with Mary E. Baird, who herself took up law and was admitted to the bar, so that she might encourage and assist her husband. However he was more interested in public life than in law, and when he was elected a delegate to the Democratic State Convention at Omaha in 1888 he delivered a speech on the tariff for revenue only, which gainde him state-wide reputation both for oratorical ability and political knowledge. In the next year he was offered the nomination for Lieutenant-Governor, but he declined, taking an active part, nevertheless, in the campaign in all parts of Nebraska. In 1890 he was nominated for Congress in a district which in 1888 had gone Republican by a majority of 3000. He accepted the nomination "and though ridiculed as an inexperienced boy by the Democrats of the rival city of Omaha and neglected by the party managers, who took no interest in the contest, regarding it as hopeless, and supplied no funds, he made a vigorous campaign on the issue of the McKinley tariff, and was elected by 32,376 votes to 25,663 for his Republican opponent, the actual Republican Representative Connell." Through the influence of Chairman Springer of the Ways and Means Committee, whom he had supported for the Speakership, Bryan was appointed to that committee. He was re-appointed to that committee at the next Congress too, to which he had been elected by a plurality of only 140 votes, though the State as a whole had gone Republican.

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He made a number of brilliant speeches on the floor of the House, on the tariff and on the silver question, and no matter how threshed out a subject was, he always commanded the attention of his listeners, even when he spoke for hours at a stretch. In 1894 he became editor of the Omaha "World-Herald" and was defeated for the United States Senate by the Republican J.M.Thurdton in the Republican landslide of that year. When he went to the Chicago National Convention in 1896, as head of the contesting silver delegation, no one thought of him as a presidential candidate, if for no other reason that that of his youth. However, this was changed when he succeeded in driving the assemblage of 15,000 persons into a frenzy ofa acclaim and enthusiasm by his famous speech in "defense of a cause as holy as the cause of liberty-the cause of humanity." It is interesting to note that he claims to have spent only $100 all told at Chicago and got the nomination, whereas Hanna spent thousands to win the nomination for his candidate, McKinley.

In his great speech Bryan spoke for the masses against the privileged few. We stand here," he declared, "representing people who are the equals before the law of the largest cities in the state of Massachusetts. When you come before us and tell us that we shall disturb your business interests, we reply that you have disturbed our business interests by your actions. We say to you that you have made too limited in its application the definition of a business man. The man who is employed for wages is as much a business man as his employer. The attorney in a country town is as much a business man as the corporation counsel in a great metropolis. The merchant at the crossroads store is as much a business man as the merchant of New York. The farmer who goes forth in the morning and toils all day, begins in the spring and toils all summer, and by the application of brain and muscle to the natural resources of this country creates wealth, is as much a business man as the man who goes upon the Board of Trade and bets upon the price of grain. The miners who go a thousand feet into the earth or climb two thousand feet upon the cliffs, and bring forth from their hiding-places the precious metals to be poured in the channels of trade, are as much business men as the few financial magnates, who, in a back room, corner the money of the world.-----

"It is for these that we speak. We do not come as aggressors. Our war is not a war of conquest. We are fighting in the defense of our homes, our families, and posterity. We have petitioned, and our petitions have been scorned. We have entreated, and our entreaties have been disregarded. We have begged, and they have mocked when our calamity came. We beg no longer; we entreat no more; we petition no more. We defy them!"

When Bryan uttered his defy, "the leaderless democracy of the West was leaderless no more. In that very moment, and in that burst of wild applause, it was acclaiming its new chief." (Peck, Twenty Years of the Republic, 500)

Turning to the money question, Bryan denounced the gold standard and protection, and brought out the class conflict by continuing with: "Mr. Carlisle said, in 1878, that this was a

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Campaign of 1896:

struggle between the idle holders of idle capital and the struggling masses who produce the wealth and pay the taxes of the country; and, my friends, it is simply a question that we shall decide upon which side shall the Democratic party fight? Upon the side of the idle holders of idle capital, or upon the side of the struggling masses? That is the question that the party must answer first; and then it must be answered by each individual hereafter. The sympathies of the Democratic party, as described by the platform, are on the side of the struggling masses, who have ever been the foundation of the Democratic party.

A # "There are two ideas of government. There are those who believe that if you just legislate to make the well-to-do prosperous, their prosperity will leak through on those below. The Democratic idea has been that if you legislate to make the masses prosperous, their prosperity will find its way up and through every class that rests upon it.

"You come to us (turning to the gold delegates) and tell us that the great cities are in favor of a gold standard. I tell you that the great cities rest upon these broad and fertile prairies. Burn down your cities and leave our farms, and your cities will spring up again as if by magic. But destroy our farms, and the grass will grow in the streets of every city in this country.

"My friends, we shall declare that this nation is able to legislate for its own people on every question, without waiting for the aid or consent of any other nation on earth, and upon that issue we expect to carry every single State in this Union. I shall not slander the inhabitants of the fair State of Massachusetts, nor the inhabitants of the State of New York by saying that, when they are confronted with the proposition, they will declare that this nation is not able to attend to its own business. It is the issue of 1776 over again. Our ancestors, when but three millions in numbers, had the courage to declare their political independence of every other nation; shall we, their descendants, when we have grown to seventy millions, declare that we are less independent than our fore-fathers? No, my friends, that will never be the verdict of our people. Therefore, we care not upon what lines the battle is fought. If they say bimetallism is good, but we cannot have it till some nation helps us, we reply that, instead of having a gold standard because England has, we shall restore bimetallism, and then let England have bimetallism because the United States have.

B and "If they dare to come out in the open defend the gold standard as a good thing, we shall fight them to the uttermost, having behind us the producing masses of the Nation and the world. Having behind us the commercial interests and the laboring interests and all the toiling masses, we shall answer their demands for a gold standard by saying to them: 'You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns - you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold!'" # See 11 B

According to the record of the convention, "the conclusion of Mr. Bryan's speech was the signal for a tremendous outburst of noise, cheers, etc. The standards of many states were carried from their places and gathered about the Nebraska delegation." # Bryan became the leader of the Democratic party.

The platform was adopted and Bryan was nominated for president on the fifth ballot. Sewall of Maine was nominated for the vice-presidency.

Record Pp. 234-235

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"The action of the Democratic National Convention on the silver question,as well as that relating to the suppression of disorders by the Federal judiciary and executive,was at once denounced by a large share of the Democratic press,in which they were joined by most of the independent papers,amny many of which in recent national campaigns had supported the Democratic nominees. Within ten days after the adoption of the platform at Chicago,more than 100 daily papers that had been accustomed to support the nominees of the Democratic party announced their opposition to the ticket and the platform. This was especially the case in the large cities east of the Mississippi and north of the Ohio,while several of the newspapers of the South,especially in the border States,took similar ground. In New York City every Democratic and Independent newspaper, with a single exception,refused to support the Democratic candidates,and most of them declared openly in favor of the election of McKinley,although in many cases they did not agree with his views on the tariff." (Annual Cycl.1896,688 and Rev.of Reviews, Vol.14,P.141)

The following are a few examples of what these hostile Democratic papers said about Bryan and the platform: New York Times:-"The candidate and platform of the Democratic convention at Chicago are absolutely rejected by the Democracy of New York. This is not a bolt,it is the vindication of true Democracy. It is stripping the disguise from an impudent pretender and whipping him out of the party whose leadership he seeks to usurp."

New York World:- "A political organization can survive being made odious; but there is peril in making it ridiculous. The nomination of a 'boy orator' for the White House at this juncture of the Nation's affairs,domestic and foreign,when the ripest experience,the best-tested wisdom,the broadest patriotism, and the greatest executive ability are required,comes perilously near taking this one fatal step from the sublime. There is no doubt as t o the result of the election except as to the size of McKinley's popular and electoral majorities."

Hartford (Conn,) Times:- "We feel assured that all true Democrats will justify us in deciding that we cannot give the support of the 'Times' to the leprosy of the Chicago platform and its politically diseased candidates."

Philadelphia Record:- "Because the 'Record' has been a firm supporter of Democratic principles it repudiates,condemns and spits upon this communistic,Populistic deliverance. With every sound money Democrat the main consideration is to defeat the candidate of the Chicago convention and to beat back the waves of repudiation and anarchy."

Baltimore News:- "The duty of every man who realizes the gravity of the menace involved by the Chicago platform is to oppose it in the only thoroughly effective way,namely,by voting for McKinley."

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