

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

TCLC 99

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Criticism of the
Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers
Who Lived between 1900 and 1999,
from the First Published Critical
Appraisals to Current Evaluations**



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Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

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Preface

Since its inception more than fifteen years ago, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC) has been purchased and used by nearly 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. TCLC has covered more than 500 authors, representing 58 nationalities and over 25,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as TCLC. In the words of one reviewer, “there is nothing comparable available.” TCLC “is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own.”

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TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author’s works. Volumes published from 1978 through 1999 included authors who died between 1900 and 1960. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, TCLC helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in TCLC presents a comprehensive survey on an author’s career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of TCLC is devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

TCLC is designed as a companion series to Gale’s *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, (CLC) which reprints commentary on authors who died after 1999. Because of the different time periods under consideration, there is no duplication of material between CLC and TCLC.

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- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

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- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
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In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces an annual paperbound edition of the *TCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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William H. Slavick, "Going to School to DuBose Heyward," *The Harlem Renaissance Re-examined*, ed. Victor A. Kramer (AMS, 1987), 65- 91; reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, vol. 59, ed. Jennifer Garipey (Detroit: The Gale Group, 1995), 94-105.

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Readers who wish to suggest new features, topics, or authors to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions or comments are cordially invited to call, write, or fax the Managing Editor:

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Bryan, William Jennings (seated in chair), photograph. The Library of Congress.—Cather, Willa, photograph. The Bettmann Archive/Corbis-Bettmann. Reproduced by permission.

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William Jennings Bryan

1860-1925

American orator and politician.

INTRODUCTION

Known as the "Great Commoner" because of his moral and political stance in favor of the rights of farmers and laborers, Bryan is remembered as one of the most respected orators in American politics. His dramatic style of delivery and his ability to give speeches without using notes or cues, as well as his stand against big business and in favor of political reform, captivated audiences throughout his career, which included three runs for president on the Democratic ticket.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Bryan was born in Salem, Illinois, in 1860. Both his mother—who educated Bryan at home—and his father—a prominent Illinois circuit judge—impressed upon him the importance of public speaking in community life. Bryan graduated from Illinois College in 1881 and Union College of Law in Chicago in 1883. He practiced law in Jacksonville, Illinois, until 1888, when he moved with his wife Mary Baird—herself a lawyer and Bryan's most trusted advisor throughout his career—to Lincoln, Nebraska. Although Nebraska was traditionally a strong Republican seat, Bryan campaigned as a Democrat to represent the First Congressional District, winning the election in 1891. Bryan's victory was due largely to his strong support of farmers and laborers in the Midwest, who, as early as the late nineteenth century, had felt the negative effects of growing corporate wealth in urban areas. Bryan's first campaign focused on his belief in returning to the free coinage of silver, which, it was believed, would help stabilize the economy by expanding the money supply with a relatively cheap metal. This, along with his other proposals for increasing the social and economic stability of the working classes, established Bryan's reputation as a Jeffersonian-style reformer. He was re-elected in 1892 on a platform that continued to include the free silver issue, but he lost his bid for the Senate seat two years later, becoming instead editor-in-chief of the *Omaha World Herald*. At the 1896 Democratic convention Bryan delivered his famous "Cross of Gold" speech, which propelled him ahead of the front-runner Richard Bland as the Democrats' favorite presidential candidate. While some Democrats refused to embrace Bryan as their candidate, he did receive endorsements from the Populist party, the Prohibition party, the Christian Socialist party, and the National Silver



party because of his reformist goals. During the campaign, Bryan set a precedent for all subsequent presidential campaigns: he traveled over 18,000 miles across the United States crusading for his causes. By contrast, his Republican opponent William McKinley remained vague on the issues and spent a great deal of money to have influential delegates brought to his home rather than traveling. Predictably, business leaders rallied against Bryan, warning their employees that companies would close down if Bryan were elected president. Bryan lost the election, 47 percent to McKinley's 51 percent, but the passion for issues and capacity for rallying supporters he had demonstrated during the campaign cemented for him an influential place in the Democratic party and the U.S. government as a whole.

In 1900 Bryan was again nominated as the Democratic presidential candidate and again he was defeated by McKinley, in large part because his focus on free silver was out of step with public concerns. In 1904 the Democrats nominated Alton B. Parker, who was defeated by Theodore Roosevelt. In the following election Bryan was again his party's candidate, but he lost to the Republican candidate

William Howard Taft. By the election of 1912 Bryan had given up pursuing the presidency, deciding instead to influence his party's platform from the bottom up. He campaigned heavily for the nomination of Woodrow Wilson, then governor of New Jersey. Wilson won the election and appointed Bryan secretary of state in 1913. Bryan experienced mixed success in his post, trying to reconcile his pacifist beliefs with his official duties. At the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Bryan encouraged a policy of neutrality. But when Wilson asked Bryan to dispatch a note denouncing Germany's sinking of the ship *Lusitania* in 1915, Bryan resigned rather than risk exclusively siding with the Allies, with whom he did not always agree, and involving the United States in the war. After his resignation, Bryan changed his stance to support the American war effort, giving speeches in which he maintained that the war could serve to make the world a better place. The rest of Bryan's career was marred by his inability to adapt to changing social circumstances and his growing disillusionment with politics. He continued campaigning for progressive reform, particularly woman suffrage, but his proclivity for moralizing led him to support many unpopular issues, such as Prohibition; additionally, Bryan argued in favor of allowing the Ku Klux Klan a voice at the Democratic national convention of 1924, which alienated his early proponents and led many to question his alliances. In 1925 Bryan, then a practicing attorney, engaged in the most controversial battle of his career: prosecuting John T. Scopes, a Tennessee schoolteacher accused of violating the state law against teaching the theory of evolution. The case, widely known as the "Monkey Trial," pitted Bryan against defense attorney Clarence Darrow and was covered by the scathing journalist H. L. Mencken, who painted Bryan's fundamentalism as backwards fanaticism. Bryan won the case, but his reputation as a progressive reformer was permanently damaged; he died of heart failure shortly after the trial.

MAJOR WORKS

Bryan's speaking abilities were evident almost immediately when he entered politics. In 1892 he delivered his first important address on tariff reform, which was a phenomenal success; the speech was published, and 100,000 copies were distributed. Throughout his career as a congressman, Bryan spoke and debated more than eighty times, each time impressing both his colleagues and the public and earning him the moniker "Great Commoner." Often his speeches were published after he delivered them, but Bryan was known for speaking without using notes, as well as for his powerful speaking voice, which did not need amplification. After he lost his congressional seat, he began to lecture professionally on the issues most important to him, especially free silver. On July 9, 1896, Bryan delivered what many consider the most important speech of his career, the "Cross of Gold" speech. Bryan spoke before a crowd of 20,000 at the Democratic national convention, imploring the people of the American West to "beg no longer" to be heard in Washington, D.C. Emphasizing the importance of expanding economic prosperity to the

working classes, Bryan used strong Christian imagery: "You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns; you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold," he said, stretching his arms out to his sides to recall the image of the crucified Christ. The audience cheered in approval for twenty-five minutes, and Bryan was nominated the next day. Bryan often infused his speeches with Christian and Biblical imagery, which appealed to his mostly Midwestern Protestant audiences, most significantly in speeches such as "Shall the People Rule?" and "Prince of Peace." Toward the end of his life, this Christian strain became more strident, as Bryan became a strong proponent of Christian fundamentalism. In addition to his speeches, Bryan wrote with his wife Mary Baird *The Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan*, published in 1925, several volumes on theological issues, and worked as a journalist and newspaper editor.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

While Bryan won a tremendous amount of popular support from the citizenry, especially people in Midwestern and Western states, he was often criticized for using dramatic imagery to obscure his policies, which many believed he could not clearly delineate. Additionally, Bryan was sometimes accused of tailoring his values to meet those of the public rather than providing leadership with his own values. Branded a regressive reactionary in his later years, largely because of his vocal involvement in the Scopes trial, Bryan is nonetheless credited with having molded the modern Democratic party with his early reform measures, which at the time had marked him as a radical. Without question, he remains one of the most dynamic and influential orators in American political history.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

- "Cross of Gold" (speech) 1896
- The First Battle: A Story of the Campaign of 1896* (nonfiction) 1897
- "The Value of an Ideal" (speech) 1901
- "The Prince of Peace" (speech) 1904
- "Shall the People Rule?" (speech) 1908
- "Lincoln as an Orator" (speech) 1909
- The Prince of Peace* (nonfiction) 1909
- "The Causeless War and Its Lessons for Us" (speech) 1916
- "A People's Constitution" (speech) 1920
- The Bible and Its Enemies* (nonfiction) 1921
- "The Menace of Darwinism" (speech) 1921
- In His Image* (nonfiction) 1922
- Orthodox Christianity versus Modernism* (nonfiction) 1923
- Christ and His Companions* (nonfiction) 1925
- "Last Message" (speech) 1925
- The Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan* [with Mary Baird Bryan] (memoirs) 1925

CRITICISM

Willa Cather (essay date 1900)

SOURCE: "The Personal Side of William Jennings Bryan," in *Prairie Schooner*, Vol. XXIII, No. 4, Winter, 1949, pp. 331-7.

[In the following essay, originally published in the July 14, 1900 issue of the periodical *Library*, Cather records her personal impressions of Bryan.]

When I first knew William Jennings Bryan he was the Democratic nominee for the First Congressional district of Nebraska, a district in which the Republican majority had never fallen below 3,000. I was a student at the State University when Mr. Bryan was stumping the State, which he had stumped two years before for J. Sterling Morton, now his bitterest political enemy. My first meeting with him was on a street car. He was returning from some hall in the suburbs of Lincoln where he had been making an address, and carried a most unsightly floral offering of large dimensions, the tribute of some of his devoted constituents, half concealed by a clumsy wrapping of tissue paper. The car was crowded, and the candidate had some difficulty in keeping his "set piece" out of the way of the passengers. A sympathetic and talkative old lady who sat next him looked up and enquired sympathetically:

"Is it for a funeral?"

Mr. Bryan looked quizzically at his encumbrance and replied politely:

"Well, I hope not, madam."

It certainly was not, for that fall he carried the Republican district by a majority of 7,000. Before that time Mr. Bryan had been a rather inconspicuous lawyer in Lincoln, by no means ranking among the ablest members of the bar. He had come there in 1887, I think, bringing with him little more than his family and law books, for his practice in Illinois had not been particularly remunerative. He came at the solicitation of his old college chum, A. R. Talbot, with whom he went into partnership. He was never a man who frequented ward caucuses, for he was an idealist pure and simple, then as now, and he had practically nothing to do with Nebraska politics until he stumped the State for Morton. Then he began to make a stir. His oratory "took hold," just as it did at the Chicago convention, and his own nomination came to him entirely unsought. In those days Mr. Bryan used to have leisure to offer occasional good advice to university students, and I believe he drilled several for oratorical contests. He wrote occasionally for the college paper of which I was editor, and was always at home to students in his library in the evening. The man's whole inner life was typefied in that library. The walls were hung with very bad old-fashioned engravings of early statesmen, and those pictures were there because Mr. Bryan liked them. Of books there were many, but of the kind of

books that are written for art's sake there were few. There were many of the old classics, and many Latin and French books, much worn, for he read them constantly. There were many lives of American statesmen, which were marked and annotated, schoolboy fashion. The works on political economy were mostly by quacks—men who were mentally one-sided, and who never rose to any true scientific eminence. There was much poetry of a didactic or declamatory nature, which is the only kind that Mr. Bryan has any taste for. In the line of fiction there was little more recent than Thackeray. Mr. Bryan used always to be urging us to read *Les Misérables* if we hadn't, and to reread it if we had. He declared that it was the greatest novel written, yet I think he had never considered its merits or demerits as a novel at all. It was Hugo's vague hyperbolic generalizations on sociological questions that he marked and quoted. In short, he read Hugo, the orator and impractical politician, not Hugo, the novelist.

The last ten years have changed Mr. Bryan very little personally. He is now, as he was then, a big, well-planted man, standing firmly on the soil as though he belonged there and were rooted to it, with powerful shoulders, exhilarating freedom of motion, and a smile that won him more votes than his logic ever did. His prominent nose and set mouth might have belonged to any of the early statesmen he emulates. His hair is rather too thin on top and rather too long behind. His eyes are as sharp and clear as cut steel, and his glance as penetrating as a searchlight. He dressed then very much like a Kentucky judge, and I believe he still clings to the low collar and black string tie. He was never anything but a hero to his valet—too much of a hero for comfort. I have seen him without his coat, but never without a high moral purpose. It was a physical impossibility for him to loaf or dawdle, or talk nonsense. His dining room was a forum. I do not mean that he talked incessantly, but that when he did talk it was in a manner forensic. He chipped his eggs to the accompaniment of maxims, sometimes strikingly original, sometimes trite enough. He buttered his toast with an epigram, and when he made jokes they were of the manifest kind that the crowd catch quickly and applaud wildly. When he was at his best, his conversation was absolutely overwhelming in its richness and novelty and power, in the force and aptness of his illustrations. Yet one always felt that it was meant for the many, not the few, that it was addressed to humanity, and that there should be a stenographer present to take it down.

There is nothing of familiarity or adroitness in the man; you never come any closer to him than just within the range of his voice. The breakfast room was always too small for him; he exhausted the air; he gave other people no chance to breathe. His dynamic magnetism either exhausted you or overstimulated you. He needs a platform, and a large perspective and resounding domes; and he needs the enthusiasm of applauding thousands to balance his own. Living near him is like living near Niagara. The almighty, ever-renewed force of the man drives one to distraction; his everlasting high seriousness makes one want

to play marbles. He was never fond of athletics. He takes no care of himself. After his own fashion he studies incessantly, yet his vitality comes up with the sun and outburns the street are lights. He has the physique of the dominant few.

In his business relations, in his civic relations, in his domestic relations, Mr. Bryan is always a statesman, large-minded, clean and a trifle unwieldy. If all this were not so absolutely natural to the man, so inseparable from him, it might be called theatric.

Mrs. Bryan's life is simply a record of hard work. She first met Mr. Bryan in Illinois when he was a college student, and she was attending the "annex" of the institution. He graduated a valedictorian and she achieved a like honor in her class. Two such brilliant and earnest young people were naturally drawn to each other. Then from the very outset there was between them a mutual enthusiasm and a great common purpose. It was a serious wooing. The days of their courtship were spent among books and often passed in conversations upon dry subjects that would terrify most women. They were both voracious readers, readers of everything: history, fiction, philosophy, poetry. From the outset their minds and tastes kept pace with each other, as they have done to this day. Bryan never read a new book, never was seized by a new idea that she did not share. Their minds seemed made for each other. Away out West, where there are no traditions, no precedents, where men meet nature singlehanded and think life out for themselves, those two young people looked about them for the meaning of things. Together they read Victor Hugo, and Dante, and Shakespeare, and had all those sacred aspirations that we can know but once. And the strange thing about these two people is that neither of them has lost that faith, and fervor, and sincerity which so often dies with youth. It is not wholly practical, perhaps, but it is a beautiful thing to see.

Mr. and Mrs. Bryan were engaged when she was nineteen and he twenty, but they were not married until four years afterwards. They lived in Illinois a little time, then moved to Lincoln, Nebraska. There, Mr. Bryan, a young man and a poor one, began to practice law in a country none too rich. In order to be better able to help him, Mrs. Bryan studied law and was admitted to the bar. She has never practiced law, but when her husband began to mingle in politics many of the duties of the law office fell upon her. To society she paid little or no attention. For there is such a thing as society, even in Nebraska. There are good dancing clubs and whist clubs, but she never found time for them. Except at political meetings and University lectures, and occasionally at the theatre, she was seldom seen in public. Into one social feature, however, Mrs. Bryan has always entered with all her characteristic enthusiasm. She is a most devout club woman. She organized the Lincoln Sorosis, and has been an active worker in the State Federation of Woman's Clubs. She and Mrs. Peattie, of Omaha, the gifted authoress of *A Mountain Woman*, were probably the most influential club women in Nebraska.

There is in Lincoln as in all university towns, a distinct college clique, and in this Mrs. Bryan has always figured prominently. Mrs. Bryan is a wheelwoman, but she has never gone wild over it or made any "century" runs. She is an expert swimmer, and Wednesday mornings she and her friends used to go down to the plunge in the sanitarium and spend the morning in the water. But she carried none of these things to excess. Mrs. William Jennings Bryan has but two "fads," the Honorable William Jennings Bryan, and the political doctrines which she believes will be the salvation of the people of the West.

Decidedly the strongest and most characteristic side of this woman is the mental one. Before all else she is a woman of intellect, not so by affectation or even by choice, but by necessity, by nature. Eastern newspapers have devoted a great deal of space criticizing Mrs. Bryan's dress. It is doubtful if she ever spent ten minutes planning the construction of a gown. But many and many an hour have she and her husband spent by their library fire talking over the future of the West and those political beliefs which may call in question their judgment, but never their sincerity. In Washington they worked out that celebrated tariff speech together, line by line. When the speech was delivered she sat unobserved in the gallery and by signals regulated the pitch of her husband's voice, until it reached just the proper volume to fill the house. She knew every word of that speech by heart, and at the finest passages her lips moved as she repeated them under her breath. Much of the reading, searching for historical references and verification fell upon her. She spent days in the National Library. Several days before the speech which made Bryan famous was delivered, he was called upon to make a eulogy upon a dead comrade. Mrs. Bryan sat in the gallery and carefully noted what tones and gestures were most effective in that hall. They prepared that speech and its delivery as quietly and considerably as an actor makes out his interpretation of a rôle. At the reception given the Bryans, Mrs. Bryan did not appear in evening dress, and the couple stood about ill at ease until the affair was over. The people who work most earnestly do not always play the most skilfully, and the peculiar inability of the Bryans to carry off social honors gracefully reminds people of that great gentleman of history who rode down to the White House and tied his horse to the palings. Mrs. Bryan held aloof from Washington society, and neither accepted nor gave invitations. She dressed plainly and stopped at a quiet hotel. She most sensibly lived within her husband's salary and helped him do his work, and this is just what she is doing now.

The distinctive feature of Mr. Bryan's career is that he began at the top. At an age when most lawyers have barely succeeded in building up a good practice, he was the leader of one of the two great political parties of America. He attained that leadership quite without financial backing or an astute political impresario; attained it singlehanded. He would not know how to manage a machine if he had one, and certainly no machine could manage him. The man himself would scorn a machine; he is by nature unfit for

such campaigning methods. His constituents are controlled not by a commercial syndicate or by a political trust, but by one man's personality.

Behind this personality there is neither an invincible principle nor an unassailable logic, only melodious phrases, a convincing voice and a hypnotic sincerity. Though he is in politics, Mr. Bryan is not a politician; he has resources to fall back upon if his main position were routed. He has not built up a power; no great captains have developed under his generalship. During these last four years, instead of planting a fort here and a base of supplies there, and sealing influential allies to himself, he has been engaging in various crusades of sentiment. If he were struck dumb, he would be as helpless as a tenor without his voice. In his brilliant study of Bryan, in *McClure's Magazine*, Will Allen White quotes the following passage on Bryan's early oratorical flights from Mrs. Bryan's biographical sketch of her husband:

"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 sophomore 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."

It is the elocutionary phases of political economy which have always appealed to Mr. Bryan most strongly. Had he attended a more sophisticated Eastern college, where a young man who talked of righting the wrongs of the world would be held under a pump, and where dramatic societies are more in vogue than debating societies, he might have felt that his call was for the stage and declaimed Shakespeare with a noble purpose and bad grace. He is an orator, pure and simple, certainly the greatest in America to-day. After all, it is not a crime to be an orator, and not necessarily ridiculous. It is a gift like any other gift, and not always a practical one. The Hon. William McKeighan was one of the first free silver agitators in Nebraska and had gone from a dugout to the halls of Congress. When McKeighan died, Bryan came down to the sun-scorched, dried-up, blown-away little village of Red Cloud to speak at his funeral. There, with an audience of some few hundreds of bronzed farmers who believed in him as their deliverer, the man who could lead them out of the bondage of debt, who could stay the drouth and strike water from the rock, I heard him make the greatest speech of his life. Surely that was eloquence of the old stamp that was accounted divine, eloquence that reached through the callus of ignorance and toil and found and awoke the stunted souls of men. I saw those rugged, ragged men of the soil weep like children. Six months later, at Chicago, when Bryan stam-

ped a convention, appropriated a party, electrified a nation, flashed his name around the planet, took the assembled thousands of that convention hall and moulded them in his hands like so much putty, one of those ragged farmers sat beside me in the gallery, and at the close of that never-to-be-forgotten speech, he leaned over the rail, the tears on his furrowed cheeks, and shouted, "The sweet singer of Israel!"

Of Mr. Bryan's great sincerity there can be no doubt. It is, indeed, the unsophisticated sort of sincerity which is the stamp of the crusader, but in a man of his native force it is a power to be reckoned with. His mental fiber is scarcely delicate enough to be susceptible to doubts. There is nothing of the *Hamlet* about William Jennings Bryan. Then his life has not been of a very disciplinary kind. It is failure and hope deferred that lead a man to modify, retrench, weigh evidence against himself, and Mr. Bryan's success has been uninterrupted.

It is scarcely necessary to say that he has no finesse. His book, *The First Battle*, is an almost unparalleled instance of bad taste. But his honesty is unquestionable. He had the courage to stick to his party when he went, a poor man, into a State where the only way to success lay through Republican influence. He favored the ratification of the treaty with Spain when his party opposed it. In the Kansas City convention he drove his party to the suicidal measure of retaining the 16 to 1 platform. He is the white elephant of his party, and yet they cannot escape the dominant influence of his personality. It is an interesting study in reactions that the most practical, and prosaic, and purely commercial people on the planet should be dazzled and half convinced by a purely picturesque figure—a knight on horseback.

Alphonse Daudet all his life made notes for a book he never wrote, a book which should be *Tartarin* and *Numa Roumestan* in one, and which should embody in the person of Napoleon the entire race of the south of France. So I think William Jennings Bryan synthesizes the entire middle West; all its newness and vigor, its magnitude and monotony, its richness and lack of variety, its inflammability and volubility, its strength and its crudeness, its high seriousness and self-confidence, its egotism and its nobility.

Edwin Wildman (essay date 1922)

SOURCE: "William Jennings Bryan: A Crusader of Advanced Ideals," in *Famous Leaders of Character: in America from the Latter Half of Nineteenth Century*, The Page Company, 1922, pp. 239-50.

[In the following essay, Wildman examines Bryan's early career.]

Judge Bryan's farm, about a mile outside of Salem, Illinois, was the show-farm of that section in 1866. It en-

tended for five hundred acres, and included a garden and a private park where fine deer were kept. In this spacious environment William Jennings Bryan, born in Salem, started his career at the age of six. This disposes of some fiction about his being the son of a poor farmer. His father was, on the contrary, a cultivated man of local importance in Illinois. He was a Circuit Judge, had served in the State Senate, was a man above the average in his community. He wanted his son to have a classical education; his wife favored the career of a lawyer, for him; young Bryan himself, at this time, wanted to be a minister. This selection was chiefly because of the religious influence his father exerted over the household. Judge Bryan was a very religious man. He made religious devotion a strict part of his daily life. He prayed three times a day, morning, noon, and night. Often when holding court, he would look at his watch, and at noon he would suspend proceedings and kneel for a few minutes in silent prayer in the courtroom. No matter where he was when noontime came, he stopped whatever he was doing for the mid-day prayer. Once he was about to mount his horse when, looking at his watch, he saw it was twelve o'clock, and he knelt beside the horse, said his silent prayer, mounted, and went on. This impressive habit influenced his son, and made him study his Bible, so that it was the model of his thoughts, his language, his reasoning. From this source can be traced that distinctive fashion of all his speeches, the form and fire of his oratory that has moved the Nation more than once. It is the form and style of Biblical literature. All his life he has been a leader—in religious movements, conducting a Sunday School, advocating prohibition, urging a cessation of war, opposing private capital in favor of Government ownership whenever expedient, pressing for direct primaries in Senatorial elections. His purpose has been that of a reformer, and most of his reforms, though scoffed at when first proposed, have become statutory laws or National policies since.

The Middle West, when Bryan grew up in it, was a section where people lived plainly, talked frankly, and hated class distinctions. All the influences of his first years of life were democratic. He didn't go to school till he was ten years old, but learned all that he knew up to that time from his father and mother. His surroundings were the quiet farmhouse, his hours were the sunrise and sunset hours of the farm, and his daily jobs were those of a boy on a farm, who attends to the chores. He could take care of the animals in the barn, plow, mow grass, pitch hay, hoe potatoes, plant a garden, or scrub the floors with the skill of many other boys of his age. After five years of the village school, he went to a preparatory school for the Illinois College, from which he was graduated when he was twenty-one. Then he went through the Union Law School in Chicago, and got his first job in a lawyer's office in that city.

During those eight years he developed normally, silently, without any outward indication of special talents for the law. But he had shown marked ability as a public speaker. He demonstrated this when he delivered the valedictory

address at his graduation from the college, where he took the second prize for oratory in the intercollegiate contest, with a declamation of an original oration called "**Justice.**"

The real start of his career occurred when he went to work in the law office of ex-Senator Lyman Trumbull, whose influence and guidance developed the latent talents that were in him. This fortunate opportunity he has always regarded as the explanation of his success as an orator. He always acknowledged his gratitude to the valuable influence of his first employer. Long years afterwards, immediately after his nomination by the Democratic Convention for President in 1896, he went from the convention hall to the grave of Senator Trumbull in Oakland Cemetery, and stood bare-headed in grateful memory of his teachings.

His first platform, however, was the kitchen table at home on which he would stand and repeat his lessons to his mother, and this habit of declamation, of "speaking a piece," was his own idea. He always felt that he could answer questions much better if he stood on the table than if he stood on the floor.

His ambition for public life started when he was twelve years old, in 1872, when his father was going through a political campaign for Congress. He watched, and listened, and saw the methods that were employed in his father's campaign, and arrived at certain fixed ideas as to how one could reach a place in public life. He planned first, when he grew up, to win a reputation and a moderate fortune in some profession, preferably the law. Then he could think of public life. But he actually reached his ambition, in later years, by seizing an unexpected opportunity.

The religious side of his life took positive form when he was only fourteen. Instead of joining the Baptist Church to which his parents belonged, he entered the First Presbyterian Church in Jacksonville, Ill., and has been a member of that church ever since.

The strict temperance in all things, which has consistently controlled the personal views of William Jennings Bryan, was based on a deeply religious sense of duty to the laws of the Church. In addition to this, during the years he spent at the preparatory school for college, from the age of fifteen to seventeen, he lived with a distant relative, Dr. Hiram K. Jones. The doctor was a scholarly sort of man with strict views of a temperate life, which he had taught at the Concord school, where he was a lecturer on Platonic Philosophy. In his home, Dr. Jones and his wife, who had no children themselves, gave young Bryan the care as of a son. He grew up in an atmosphere of intense and rigid self-discipline.

In tracing the early influences of his life, besides the religious temperament of his father, the healthy and scholarly guidance of his two mentors in Chicago, Dr. Jones and Senator Trumbull, must be added the inspiration and devotion of the girl he met at the Illinois College, and whom he subsequently married.