

“Bryan! Bryan! Bryan!”

Bryan: A Political Biography of William Jennings Bryan, by Louis W. Koenig, *New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1971. 736 pp. \$14.95.*

THIS LATEST BOOK of Louis Koenig, professor of government at New York University, is a massive, comprehensive, scholarly account of the life and career of the Great Commoner, concisely set in the history of the times, exhaustively researched, and splendidly written. It will appeal to readers of biography because it contains much about the personal development of the man from birth to death, his thoughts, beliefs, and way of life, and the influence of family background, education, marriage and worldly experience upon that development. It will appeal to those whose experience or memories reach back to the days of Bryan's prominence on the American scene from the Cross of Gold speech of 1896 to the Great Monkey Trial at Dayton, Tennessee in 1925—a prominence which embraced most of his adult life and which transcended his political defeat and decline because of his superb oratory, his religious and political writings, and his espousal of Bible Christianity on which much of that prominence was based. It will appeal to readers of American history be-

cause Bryan embodied in his person some of the late nineteenth century attributes of the American character, of the American way of life, of the American dream, as manifested west of the Allegheny Mountains from the Canadian to the Mexican border; also because in his life and career he embodied some of the major historical trends and forces of the period, quite apart from his participation in government as a Congressman from Nebraska or as Secretary of State in the cabinet of President Woodrow Wilson. It will appeal especially to all those readers interested in practical politics and the functioning of American political parties because, since Bryan was enmeshed in local, state, and national political activity, in and out of office, and throughout his adult life, Professor Koenig devotes a large part of the book to delineating in detail not only the role of Bryan but also the roles of many other major and minor politicians in the Democratic National Conventions of 1896, 1900, 1904, 1908, 1912, 1916, 1920 and 1924; in the Republican National Conventions of 1896, 1912, and 1916; and in the corresponding presidential campaigns and elections, not to mention some congressional elections and the local and state politics of Nebraska. In the narration of these developments, occurring in historical sequence throughout the volume, Professor Koenig provides the reader with a handbook of American party politics and practical politics for the period. Furthermore, it will appeal to social and political reformers, for they will find in Bryan a protagonist of such reforms in his time and will find satisfaction, as he did, in their fulfillment, even by others, but for which, as the author makes clear, Bryan must receive the credit—or “the blame,” if that is the way the reader sees it.

These reforms furthered by Bryan were fulfilled in four constitutional amendments; the popular election of senators, the graduated income tax, woman's suffrage, and prohibition. Finally, the book will appeal to the devoutly religious readers, for faith in a divinity which shapes our ends was the

rock on which Bryan stood, the basis of his thought, conduct, and actions, permitting him to weather the trials and tribulations of his life and career with a calmness and an optimism which only divine faith can provide and which such readers will find exemplary, and explanatory of a man whom some consider an enigma.

Bryan was a man of many parts—able lawyer, writer of books and articles, editor and publisher of a newspaper, teacher of Bible Christianity, superb orator, world traveller, and, as defined by the author, a “rare politician,” who in his life and career “combined politics and religion,” convinced, like his parents, that “Christian principles” should be applied “through politics to public affairs,” who “perceived and discussed the social and economic issues largely in religious terms,” and who would never “sell the truth to serve the hour.” Yet he was a practical politician, profound in his knowledge of political organization, skilled in political maneuver, alert to the influence of pressure groups and public opinion, and a fighter, even in defeat, for the unity and victory of his party. Members and supporters of each American party, the Democratic and the Republican, will find this aspect of the book enjoyable, though for different reasons.

Though Bryan's political career contained disappointments which would have destroyed lesser men, his personal and domestic life—a childhood of reciprocal affection with his parents, his charming courtship of Mary, the compatibility and happiness of their marriage to his death in sleep that Sunday afternoon in Dayton, Tennessee—will arouse the envy of many a reader, and his other careers, as writer, as evangelical preacher, as “champion of the American lecture circuit,” will call forth the reader's respect, if not admiration, for this remarkable and controversial man.

Equally rewarding to the reader will be the historical descriptions of Lincoln, Nebraska, and Chicago, Illinois, of Bryan's lecture tours, political and religious, of his

appearance on the platform, of the millions of followers ever calling for him to speak—"Bryan! Bryan! Bryan!"—of the details of his dress, of how many shirts and handkerchiefs he used up in the mid-summer heat of the Mississippi valley, of how he outsmarted the pickpockets, of his trips to Europe, of his meeting with Tolstoi, and of his and Mary's world tour.

All this and more is contained in this book by Koenig, written with sympathy and understanding, with dramatic reconstruction and romantic color, and based on a plethora of source material. As remarkable as the life and career of Bryan is the research of the author as evidenced by his footnotes and his bibliographical essay on the sources. Besides other studies of Bryan, the works of Bryan, periodical literature on Bryan, published papers, memoirs, autobiographies and biographies of the period, specialized books on the Roosevelt era, the Wilson era, and the Dayton Trial, local state journals and histories, and the *Congressional Record*, Professor Koenig has consulted and made use of the Bryan Papers at the Library of Congress, the National Archives, the State Historical Society archives of Illinois and Nebraska, and Occidental College; other manuscript collections containing Bryan Papers or papers relating to Bryan, namely the papers of some sixty-five major and minor persons of the period deposited at national, state, and university libraries and archives throughout the country; some thirty-one newspapers published in a variety of cities throughout the country; and lastly a vast selection of specialized books on politics and politicians and on personality and behavior. The reviewer stands overwhelmed, but he has one criticism. Although the author draws fine verbal portraits of Bryan at intervals throughout the narrative and portrays the significance of the Great Commoner in the opening chapter, there is not a picture in the book!

Reviewed by HENRY M. ADAMS