

This Bryan of Nebraska Gets What He Wants

(From the Kansas City Star, Nov. 26, 1922.)

"The king is dead. Long live the king!"

They have a situation of that kind in Nebraska, but they don't say the words because William Jennings Bryan—the "Commoner"—isn't dead by any means. He's just moved out of the state, that's all.

But that moving—the act of changing the breezes of Fairview, the Lincoln home of "W. J.," as they call him there, for the palmy shade of Miami, Fla.—has made him dead as far as active participation in Nebraska politics is concerned. So look who's to sit in the gubernatorial chair and rule the roost now—no one but "Brother Charley," his younger kinsman.

"Brother Charley" rode into office at the last election by 50,000 votes, the largest majority a governor of Nebraska ever had. Yet the Republicans elected their senator in Nebraska by 75,000 votes—and they elected a Republican state legislature, too.

How, then, did 125,000 voters happen to cross over to the Democratic ballot, put an "X" beside Charley Bryan's name and cross back?

That's the story—the story of "Brother Charley."

Some families seem predestined for certain careers, the Cantillons for baseball, the Barrymores for the stage, the Morgans for a financial career. Working along that line, it must just be natural for a Bryan to get into politics.

"W. J.'s" and "Charley's" father, Silas L. Bryan, was a highly respected district judge in Illinois and member of the constitutional convention. "W. J." twice has been a member of congress, was secretary of state in the Wilson cabinet, and three times Democratic nominee for president. "Brother Charley" has been "W. J.'s" "side kick" through all his hardest political battles, and has taken time to mill furiously in Nebraska politics on his own account. Silas II, "Charley's" son, was Democratic nominee for lieutenant-governor of Minnesota at the last election, and that when he was only 29 years old.

"Brother Charley" first got into the game in 1896 when "W. J."—then only 36 years old and barely of age to qualify for president—was telling a thrilled Democratic convention at the Chicago Coliseum, "You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns. You shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold."

After William McKinley had defeated "W. J." for the presidency that year "W. J." strolled into his office and found that he had a small matter of unanswered mail on his hands—that there were exactly 186,000 postcards, letters and telegrams that shouted for replies, with only him to do the replying. Realizing that the job was one that, attended to alone, would tie him up through many political fights to come he looked around for help, and found that "Brother Charley"—Charles W. Bryan is the full and dignified name—was in business in Omaha.

"Charley ought to be in politics," "W. J." told the rest of the family. "He's only seven years younger than I am and we could help each other a lot. Why not have him give me a lift with these letters as a starter?"

So it was agreed. "Charley" rode on a Northwestern train from Omaha over to Lincoln. Then he hired two secretaries and eleven stenographers. With "W. J." they started to wade into the mail. It took them a year and a half to complete their task—but they finished it. After the job was over "Charley" knew half the important politicians of the country and had been in correspondence with the other half. He was in the game for life—wild horses could not get him out of it.

"The Commoner," the political organ of the Bryans and of a good share of Democracy, was founded in 1901, and "Brother Charley" gave a large part of his time to that. He helped "W. J." in his races for the presidency in 1900 and 1908 and became more and more acquainted with politics "as she is played" during that time. He coasted into occupancy of the mayor's chair at Lincoln six years ago and gave the town a corking good administration during his two year's tenure of office.

He was asked to run again.

"No," he said. "It's back to the side lines for me for a while."

Now—here in this year of Our Lord, 1922—

he is chosen governor of the state and Nebraska (at least that part of the state that is not nursing a grievance over the recent election) is planning big things for him when the impending term of office holding is over. "Watch him go!" his boosters say.

What put "Brother Charley" into the executive chair of Nebraska, when only one man on his ticket, the secretary of state, went in with him? A large share of a quality that baseball players, football players and William Allen White come out and out and call "guts." "Nerve" doesn't express it, because "nerve" implies trying to put over something that perhaps the person is not entitled to. The one expressive word in this case has been used. The reader can take it or leave it.

WHEN THE BRYANS MET HERE

The last time the writer saw "Brother Charley," before an interview a few days ago, was one morning, a year and a half back, when the two brothers, Charley and W. J., were having breakfast together at the Hotel Baltimore.

Charley and Frank Zehrung—another Lincoln man—had both announced for mayor of their home city, then run for a commissioner's place—Lincoln having the commission form of government, and the law being that the five commissioners shall vote on a mayor. Charley polled 650 more votes than Zehrung, and Lincoln consequently expected him automatically to be named mayor—that being the town's way of expressing its preference according to its laws. Imagine everyone's surprise when the four commissioners met and voted, their 4 votes against Charley's 1, to seat Zehrung in the executive chair and make Charley commissioner of streets and public improvements.

Charley's backers came to him and said, "Resign, then file a recall petition against Zehrung and get him out of there. Then run for the place again and we'll put you across."

He told "W. J." at breakfast that day what they wanted him to do.

"Well, you'd win easily enough that way," "W. J." said.

"Yes," "Charley" replied. "But I'm going to win anyway, I am going to beat these fellows at their own game and make them like it."

He then changed the subject, but not before "W. J." shook his head wonderingly and said: "Well—I like your nerve."

"Charley" had three pet projects he wanted to put across. One was a municipal coal yard for Lincoln. The second was a municipal ice plant. The third was a new market. He didn't care whether he was commissioner of streets or mayor or governor of the state, as long as those propositions went across. This is how he went out to get them.

He introduced a coal yard ordinance before the council. It was voted down.

Then he circulated through the town six petitions providing for:

1. A special election under the initiative to provide for establishing a municipal coal yard by direct vote.
2. A bond issue for a municipal ice plant.
3. A \$20,000 appropriation for a new market.
4. An amendment to the charter to vote for the mayor direct.
5. The recall of Zehrung.
6. The recall of John Wright, commissioner of public safety.

He asked for volunteer circulators to put the petitions out and a throng of townspeople answered his call. They got not only enough legal voters to sign the petitions, but enough to carry his ideas across the moment they came up at the polls. That left him "sitting pretty."

With the signed petitions in his desk—like pleasant little aces in the hole—he reintroduced his coal yard ordinance in the Lincoln council.

"You see," he pointed out to the other commissioners quietly, "if we have to go to the expense of calling a public election on this matter, I'll just put in the other petitions—including the recall ones—at the same time. What do you think?"

The other members of the council retired into a corner and "thought." Then they came back and decided to establish a municipal coal yard in Lincoln. Wherefore, such of the town as desired it got coal at the municipal yard last winter at a saving of \$4 a ton, with "Brother

Charley" holding the reins as superintendent of the institution.

The opponents of the yard fought the case to the bitter end. They carried it up to the supreme court of the state and that body decided that under Lincoln's then-existent charter the coal yard couldn't be. But that was this year, after Lincoln had had a winter of cheap coal.

"Brother Charley" introduced an amendment that would fix the charter so the coal yard would be all right and the coal men, in retaliation, circulated petitions proposing a municipal lumber yard, municipal hardware stores, and municipally-run institutions to a degree that was laughable. They finally presented their petitions with the required number of names on them and "Brother Charley," rising in council, said, "Let's look at those names."

The examination was started and caused a furor in Lincoln. People corresponding to one-third of the names on the coal men's petitions could not be found at all. Many others, who could be found, denied they had signed the petitions and requested that their names be scratched off it. Enough names were eliminated in those two ways to prevent the lumber and hardware store amendments from cluttering up the ballot on the coal yard, and a vote was held on that alone.

It went 4,700 to 400 in "Brother Charley's" and the yard's favor—a majority of more than eleven to one for Bryan's innovation. The charter was amended, the coal yard came back into being, and is selling cheap coal to Lincoln for its second winter—with "Brother Charley" still at its helm and grinning cheerfully at the interests he beat to establish it.

About the same time—or even a little before—he shot across the direct-election-for-mayor petition by a three to one majority, which only served to put in indelible ink the handwriting on the wall that said, "This man is putting through the innovations that he wants in Lincoln. What's next on his mind?"

The ice plant was next, and from "Brother Charley's" desk about midsummer this year came the ominous rustling of the ice petition as he got it out and looked it over—looked it over so audibly that all Lincoln knew what was going on and particularly the officials of the Beatrice Creamery company—which controlled the ice situation in the town.

Just as the ice papers were rustling loudest from "Brother Charley's" office there was a conference between representatives of the ice dealers and Lincoln's chamber of commerce and the price of ice was cut right in the hottest season of the year, an unknown proceeding for any town, any time, anywhere.

The first thing the consumers knew about it was when the individual ice men announced from back door to back door that the next book of tickets, wouldn't cost so much.

"What's the idea?" the housekeepers asked. "We're enabled to take up a hitch in our overhead and we're giving the saving to you," a few suave ones explained lengthily.

"Charley Bryan," a greater proportion of blunt ones said curtly.

Lincoln's saving on the deal was \$44,000 for the season—\$11,000 for each month—\$1 a month for each family. The ice petition went back into "Brother Charley's" desk. It still rustles whenever a mention is heard of higher prices for ice. So do the others the moment a rustle is needed—especially the recall ones. The result is that "Brother Charley," as commissioner of streets in Lincoln, has put through as many reforms as he could have done as mayor. And he "made them like it," as he told "W. J." he would.

When Nebraska's Democratic party faced the fall elections this year it found itself split into two divisions as evenly as an apple broken through the center. One was that the people called the "wet" branch, led by Gilbert M. Hitchcock, senior senator from Nebraska, and a power in Democratic circles at Washington. The other was the "dry" crew—guided by "Brother Charley," dry as the Sahara Desert on the liquor question, dry as "W. J." ever has been or will be, which is saying it all in nine words.

It became apparent that if the party wanted to have any luck before the voters at the polls the two forces would have to get together and present some sort of unified front against the Republican onslaught. The time for filing for the primaries approached and neither Hitchcock, who was slated to run for senator, nor "Brother Charley," who was supposed to be the gubernatorial choice, turned in their names.

"Charley," speaking through The Commoner, suggested a way that the two branches could

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