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WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN AND THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

by SAMUEL PROCTOR

WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN resigned as Secretary of State on June 8, 1915, and retired to his home in Florida. Edgar Lee Masters described him at this time as "the Christian Statesman, out of a job . . . no longer a presidential possibility, nor a law-maker nor a law-giver."¹ The last decade of Bryan's life was not a period of inactivity, however. A critic has said that it was during these years that Bryan identified himself "with some of the worst tendencies in American life-prohibition, the crusade against evolution, real estate speculation, and the Klan."² As his national political power declined, his interest in the political, religious, civic, and social life of Florida increased. His speaking tours and public appearances carried him into almost every county in the state where thousands flocked to hear him talk and where his advice and counsel were constantly solicited.

Bryan had come to Florida for the first time during the Spanish-American War. As a colonel with the Third Nebraska Volunteer Infantry he was stationed for a few weeks in 1898 in Jacksonville.³ The Bryans were frequent visitors to Florida after that, and in 1912 they purchased a winter home in Miami. "Villa Serena," as they called it, became one of the city's showplaces, and it was not unusual for them to entertain as many as five hundred guests at their weekly Friday afternoon open house.⁴ Bryan's Tourist Bible Class was one of the distinctive features of Miami's winter season. Held in Royal Palm Park, it attracted thousands of people each Sunday morning.⁵ After Bryan transferred his legal residence from Nebraska to Florida in 1921,

1. Edgar Lee Masters, "The Christian Statesman," *The American Mercury*, III (December, 1924), 388.
2. Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It* (New York, 1949), 199.
3. W. J. Bryan, "From Nebraska to Florida. A Memorandum," May 31, 1921, in the Bryan Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. This memorandum, edited by Samuel Proctor, appeared in *Nebraska History*, XXXVII (March, 1956), 59-65.
4. W. J. Bryan and Mary Baird Bryan, *The Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan* (Philadelphia, 1925), 435-36.
5. *Ibid.*, 452; *Miami Daily News*, July 27, 1925.

[1]

many people and several newspapers encouraged him to throw his hat into Florida's political ring and to announce his candidacy for either governor or United States senator.⁶ It was also during this period of his life that Bryan became interested in the University of Florida.

He first spoke on the University campus January 8, 1916, when he was introduced by President Albert A. Murphree. Bryan's major interest at the moment was foreign affairs, and he titled his talk "Lessons Gleaned from the European War." After commending Woodrow Wilson on his sincerity, and congratulating himself on the efforts that he had made to keep the United States out of the European conflict, he launched into an attack on the so-called "preparedness theory." Claiming that agitation for a strong defense policy was "a mercenary measure sought by those who would gain the most from it," he denounced those who would make "hatred a national policy." His premise was that the war had completely exploded the doctrine "that military preparedness prevents war." On the question of the traditional rights of an American citizen the Great Commoner said: "If an American for selfish reasons sails on a belligerent ship and places the peace of his nation in jeopardy, he should be taken off the ship by government authority and given a lesson in patriotism."⁷

Bryan's genius for oratory was his most powerful asset. He was recognized as one of the most effective public speakers of his time, and his ability to charm an audience was widely recognized. His Gainesville speech was no exception. His voice had not yet lost much of its brilliance, and it was as warm and as compelling as ever. It is little wonder that *The Alligator*, the student newspaper, reported that he had "carried his audience with him all the way."⁸

This visit to Gainesville in 1916 introduced Bryan to the community which he claimed was "his favorite next to Miami,"⁹ and to President Murphree with whom he was to maintain a close

6. There are several letters in the Bryan correspondence in the Library of Congress which reveal the interest that Bryan and his friends had, at the time, in the possibilities of a political career in Florida (May M. Jennings to Bryan, Dec. 15, 1921; J. H. Carter to Bryan, April 15, 1921; N. P. Bryan to Bryan, Jan. 14, 1922; Rabbi Stephen S. Wise to Bryan, Jan. 20, 1922; Bryan to J. F. Essary, Feb. 15, 1922; Bryan to O. B. Howse, April 13, 1922).

7. *The Alligator*, January, 14, 1916.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *The Daily Sun* (Gainesville), February 22, 1922.

friendship throughout the remainder of his life. Murphree had been serving as president since 1909 and before that he had been president of the Florida State College for Women in Tallahassee. In many ways these two men were kindred spirits. Their ancestry was Southern Baptist-Methodist, although Bryan eventually became a Presbyterian. Both were deeply religious and regularly attended church and Sunday School. Prayer and Bible reading was part of their daily routine. Each played active leadership roles in his own church.

Religion probably exerted more influence over Bryan's public and private actions than any other single force. Mrs. Bryan said that her husband's faith was marked by freedom from doubt. "Others might waver, drift and struggle," she wrote, but "he went serenely on, undisturbed. . . . He had a firm faith in the inspiration of the Bible in which he had been nurtured, a strong belief in a guiding and protecting power, and a comforting reliance on the efficacy of prayer."¹⁰

Dr. Murphree's religious enthusiasm had been similarly described by the minister of his church in Gainesville: "I am not unmindful of his charming personality, his genial disposition, his friendly spirit, and his generous heart; but I am thinking primarily of the simplicity and fervor of his religious faith and the humility and tenderness of his soul."¹¹ He too built his hopes upon the divine teachings of the Bible, and depended upon his religious faith for guidance.

Neither Bryan nor Murphree wavered in their belief in the authenticity and authority of the Scriptures as "the Inspired Word of God." Bryan approved Murphree's insistence that University of Florida students attend chapel on campus twice a week, and that Scripture reading and prayer be included in each service.¹² It must also have pleased Bryan to know that Murphree had said that the University would "not engage, or retain, a professor who is known to be irreligious." A condition of membership on the

10. *The Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan*, 457.

11. Orland K. Armstrong, *The Life and Work of Dr. A. A. Murphree*. (St. Augustine, 1928), 121, quoting statement of Dr. Thomas V. McCaul, Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Gainesville.

12. M. E. Parrott to J. B. Clark, August 29, 1921, in Murphree Papers, University of Florida Archives.

faculty, during Murphree's administration, was that the person be "a member of some evangelical church."¹³

In their puritanical outlook, in their understanding of what was morally right, and in their inflexible attitude toward moral issues, Bryan and Murphree were alike. Both men were, each in his own way, religiously intolerant, and it is likely that Murphree joined Bryan in adhering to the belief that "a Christian, American democrat was the greatest work of God." Both men were determined to root out sin and evil wherever it was revealed but they were particularly insistent that the schools and colleges be kept as pure as possible. In answering a *Literary Digest* inquiry in 1921 relative to his feeling about social demoralization on American campuses, President Murphree said: "What is needed to prevent the shameless form of dancing and the indecent costumes worn by young people attending dances and parties is some 'daddies and mummies.' The low-cut gowns, the rolled hose and short skirts are born of the devil and his angels and are carrying the present and future generations to social chaos and destruction."¹⁴ It was also during this period that Bryan was lecturing before religious and civic organizations and on the Chautauqua, and in his speeches he described how the evils of drink, gambling and loose living had enhanced the "brute theory" which had "undermined the faith of many of our young people in college."¹⁵

The Young Men's Christian Association, in which Bryan had always been interested, was an important part of campus activities in Gainesville. Membership was open to all students, regardless of religious faith, and a large part of the Y.M.C.A. program at the University operated on a non-sectarian basis.¹⁶ In 1919, George E. White, a Presbyterian minister and a close personal friend of Bryan, was appointed general secretary of the University Y.M.C.A. He and Murphree conceived the idea of erecting on campus a student religious-activities building. The state legislature was reluctant to appropriate funds for such a structure, but Murphree and White thought that the necessary

13. Murphree to O. D. Foster, May 30, 1921, in Murphree Papers, UF Archives.

14. "College Presidents Who Find Conditions Bad," *The Literary Digest*, LXIX (May 14, 1921), 58-61.

15. Bryan to John A. Marquis, May 2, 1923, in Bryan Papers, Library of Congress.

16. Murphree to P. K. Yonge, May 11, 1916, in Murphree Papers, UF Archives.

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money could be secured by a general subscription campaign. A fund raising organization was employed to do most of the work, but it was considered wise to have an important name as campaign chairman.¹⁷ Consequently, White wired Bryan on January 9, 1923, asking if he would serve in that capacity, and received an acceptance telegram in a matter of hours.¹⁸ Bryan wrote Murphree that he was "glad to aid in so meritorious an enterprise."¹⁹

He did much more than lend his name to the \$250,000 campaign. He travelled the state, making dozens of speeches, issuing appeals through the press, and approaching his friends for donations. He mailed out hundreds of letters asking for funds to save Florida students "from materialism," and to help consecrate their "learning to the service of God and the welfare of mankind."²⁰ He organized a one thousand dollar club and secured large donations from such men as Glenn H. Curtiss, J. C. Penny, and James Deering. Bryan himself pledged fifteen hundred dollars.

The drive opened with a large meeting in Daytona Beach, and during the next few weeks Bryan spoke over seventy times before civic, church and alumni groups. Driving his black Ford automobile across the narrow, dusty Florida roads, speaking sometimes four and five times a day, he was reminded of his old campaign days, and he seemed to thrive on excitement and a crowded schedule.²¹

Some of the meetings were elaborate affairs, such as the one staged in the flower-bedecked grand ballroom of the Royal Poinciana Hotel in Palm Beach. Samuel Untermeyer, the well-known attorney, was co-chairman with Bryan at this meeting and several thousand dollars were subscribed. In emphasizing the religious needs of college men, Bryan said: "The path of the young man . . . is continually beset by the devil and if the rest of us are as persistent in trying to protect him from the devil as the devil

17. White to Bryan, Jan. 9, 1923, in Bryan Papers, Library of Congress.

18. Bryan to White, Jan. 10, 1923, in Bryan-Murphree Correspondence, UF Archives.

19. Bryan to Murphree, Jan. 11, 1923, in Bryan-Murphree Correspondence, UF Archives.

20. Copy of letter, undated, in Miscellaneous Papers, (Letter Box, Y.M.C.A.), UF Archives.

21. *The Alligator*, March 17, 1923.

is to beset him, he will have no difficulty in treading the path right. . . ." He told his audience that colleges had a responsibility to educate not only "the mind of the young man," but "to train his heart as well." "A good heart with a good mind will make a good man," he said, "but the good mind alone will not be successful, and if the heart goes wrong it takes the mind with it."²²

Another large meeting was held in the Duval County Armory in Jacksonville and was sponsored by local civic clubs. The Gator band came from Gainesville to play for this affair. In Tampa there was some difficulty because of a conflict with a planned drive to raise \$250,000 to establish the University of Tampa. In Miami the initial attempts to secure subscriptions were so disappointing that it was decided to postpone the campaign until fall.²³ Everywhere else the drive succeeded, so far as pledges were concerned. These were "boom" days, and securing pledges was relatively easy; getting the cash was another matter. During the first ten weeks of the campaign more than \$135,000 had been subscribed, but only \$27,000 had been collected.

Bryan worked out a pattern for the meetings. The University Quartette, which included Milton Yeats, who wrote the University's "Alma Mater," James Melton, later of the Metropolitan Opera, George Anderson, and Nathan Mayo, Jr., opened with a medley of popular songs. The local chairman of the drive and Y.M.C.A. Secretary White explained the lack of religious-student activity facilities on the campus and the reasons for asking the public to support the construction of a building. If President Murphree or a faculty member was present he spoke and then a local dignitary introduced Bryan whose task it was to convince the audience of the need for generous subscriptions. Money and cards, denoting the amount of the pledge and the manner in which it was to be paid, were turned in at the close of the meeting and were then forwarded to state headquarters in the Seminole Hotel in Jacksonville.

The campaign ran into financial complications, and it was never really completed. Approximately \$179,000 was finally pledged, but by the summer of 1925 only \$79,682 had been collected. Almost all of the additional subscribers defaulted, par-

22. Miami *Daily Metropolis*, Feb. 7, 1923.

23. Murphree to Bryan, March 7, 1923, in Bryan Papers, Library of Congress.

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ticularly after the collapse of the "boom" in 1926. Bryan himself did not pay all of his original pledge. According to President Murphree campaign expenses had amounted to \$33,909, or about forty-three percent of the total collected. The failure of the Florida Bank and Trust Company of Gainesville in 1924 had cost the fund \$15,759.²⁴ As a result, construction of a student activities building, or Florida Union as it was called, was not started until the 1930's.

The campaign had publicized the University. Bryan said the institution should emphasize more than ever, its "spiritual element," and suggested as a University motto: "Your son is safe here." In a letter to Murphree he pointed out that such emphasis would result in an increased enrollment and added prestige for the University. "We can make a specialty of developing the religious side of life," he said, "so that the students will go out from the school one hundred per cent men, ready to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's."²⁵

Not all of the reaction was favorable. Former Governor Sidney J. Catts wrote the following note after he received Murphree's circular letter requesting a donation:

Yours received, asking my support in your YMCA Building. The tone of your letter shows me that you do not care for my support. Any man who writes to a former Governor of the State after all Committees have been formed and addresses him as *Mr.* is either a fool or he does not want the support of *that man*. We all know you are not a fool, so you do not want my support.

No man in the State could have raised you more money than I. But as I have been left to the 11th hour and asked to 'play second fiddle' to others, why you go on without me. However, I will do nothing to hurt the movement for development at home is what I believe in.²⁶

During the early weeks of the campaign Bryan had remarked that he was securing "so much pleasure out of it that, to use a common phrase, the obligation is all on my side. I will get so

24. Murphree to P. K. Yonge, May 7, 1924, in Murphree Papers, UF Archives; and Murphree to Bryan, March 26, 1925, Murphree-Bryan Correspondence, UF Archives.

25. Bryan to Murphree, Feb. 2, 1923, in Bryan Papers, Library of Congress.

26. Catts to Murphree, Feb. 4, 1923, in Murphree Papers, UF Archives.

much reward out of this work that I fear I shall be subject to persecution as a profiteer.”²⁷ The campaign was hardly under-way before Bryan was accused of profiteering. Although there is nothing to indicate any validity to these accusations, there were rumors that Bryan received a percentage of the subscriptions. Murphree said that it was a “dirty lie that enemies of Mr. Bryan are circulating.”²⁸

The student body adopted a resolution thanking Bryan for his work,²⁹ he was commended by the student newspaper, and at the June, 1923, commencement he received an honorary Doctor of Laws from the University. When Florida Union was finally built, the main lounge was named in honor of William Jennings Bryan.

The building campaign was only one of Bryan's interests in the University of Florida. In January, 1923, he conceived of a plan to get college students all over the country to sign a whiskey pledge. It was to be tried first on the Gainesville campus, and, if it succeeded, Bryan hoped that the movement would spread to other campuses. He suggested that Murphree get a book, large enough to hold several thousand names, and inscribe on the first page the following pledge: “We, the undersigned, promise, God helping us, never to use intoxicating liquor as a beverage.” The President, faculty, and students were supposed to affix their signatures at some formal, public ceremony.³⁰ When Bryan made this suggestion the students were taking semester examinations, and Murphree decided that pledge cards delivered through the mail with an explanatory letter would serve the same purpose. He immediately assured Bryan that so far as the faculty was concerned no man could hold a position “who uses intoxicating liquors as a beverage.”³¹

When Bryan learned that all of the faculty and seventy-five per cent of the students had signed the pledge cards, he con-

27. Bryan to Murphree, Feb. 12, 1923, in Murphree-Bryan Correspondence, UF Archives.

28. Murphree to F. M. Swanson, Aug. 6, 1924, in Murphree Papers, UF Archives.

29. Original resolution, dated May 4, 1923, is in Bryan Papers, Library of Congress.

30. Bryan to Murphree, Jan. 11, 1923, in Murphree-Bryan Correspondence, UF Archives.

31. Murphree to Bryan, Jan. 16, 1923, in Murphree-Bryan Correspondence, UF Archives.

gratulated the University in an editorial printed in his newspaper *The Commoner*. President Murphree, according to this article, had "set the University of Florida on an eminence; he has made it conspicuous throughout the nation; he has put it back of prohibition in the most effective way possible."³² The Lincoln-Lee Legion of the Total Abstinence Department of the Anti-Saloon League of America also congratulated the University on its enviable record of sobriety and pledged its support in the nationwide campaign.

It is difficult to ascertain how effective this anti-whiskey drinking campaign was on the Gainesville campus over a period of time. One student immediately informed the President that he would agree not to drink in Gainesville, but that he did not see how he could adhere to the pledge at home, particularly when his father always invited him to have a drink. In fact, he said, his father received a case of liquor every two months from Miami.³³ The following year, Murphree answered an inquiry from *The Christian Science Monitor* with the statement: "The effect of prohibition on students of our institution has undoubtedly reduced the amount of drinking . . . the students' attitude towards prohibition is decidedly favorable."³⁴

The campaign was not as successful elsewhere in the country. In a letter to Murphree, Bryan complained about the "dodging of some of the university presidents in regard to pledge signing."³⁵ President M. L. Burton of the University of Michigan had refused to ask his faculty to sign the pledge since he said it "would be regarded by them as an interference . . . with their personal affairs."³⁶ Other college presidents answered Bryan's request in a similar vein, even though Bryan had pointed out in his letter that two instructors from a North Carolina institution had been fired after they were discovered making wine in the bathtub.³⁷

32. Copy of editorial, undated, in Murphree Papers, UF Archives.

33. Murphree to Bryan, April 2, 1923, in Bryan Papers, Library of Congress.

34. Murphree to W. J. Abbot, April 29, 1924, in Murphree Papers, UF Archives.

35. Bryan to Murphree, March 27, 1923, in Murphree-Bryan Correspondence, UF Archives.

36. M. L. Burton to Bryan, April 10, 1923, in Bryan Papers, Library of Congress.

37. Bryan to Pres., Mass. State Univ., April 3, 1923, in Bryan Papers, Library of Congress.

The cause of evolution was another tie binding Bryan to the University of Florida. He had always regarded the concept of evolution as a dangerous menace because it questioned the literal interpretation of the Bible, the very foundation of his faith. With his fundamentalist ideas of God, Christ, and the Bible, it is little wonder that he regarded belief in the Darwinian theory of evolution the greatest menace to the Christian religion.³⁸ As he expressed it, "Evolutionists weaken faith in the Bible by discarding as false the account of man's creation by separate act; and then having accepted evolution as if it were a fact, they proceed to discard miracles and the supernatural, including the virgin birth of Christ and the bodily resurrection of Christ. When they have eliminated all of the Bible that conflicts with evolution, the Bible is no longer an authority, but merely a 'scrap of paper'."³⁹

Bryan fought Darwinism—a term that he used synonymously with evolution—on every front, but he was determined that the colleges and universities of the nation would not teach evolution as fact. Mrs. Bryan said that her husband was convinced that such teaching had caused young people to lose faith in the Bible and to leave the church.⁴⁰ Something had to be done about this problem, and Bryan wanted to know whether teachers, paid by taxation, should "be permitted to substitute the unproved hypothesis of scientists for the 'Thus saith the Lord' of the Bible, and so undermine the faith of the children of Christian taxpayers."⁴¹ He told one college audience that "no teacher should be allowed on the faculty of any American university unless he is a Christian." "Where the Bible is not taught," he insisted, "no other philosophy should be substituted."⁴²

When he published his famous pamphlet, "The Menace of Darwinism," he sent two hundred copies to Dr. Murphree to be distributed to the Florida faculty and to the students taking sociology courses.⁴³ On February 21, 1922, he lectured on evolu-

38. M. R. Werner, *Bryan* (New York, 1929), 294.

39. Miami *Daily Metropolis*, May 9, 1923, quoted in Jack Mills, "The Speaking of William Jennings Bryan in Florida, 1915-1925" (unpublished Master's thesis, University of Florida, 1948), 30.

40. *The Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan*, 479.

41. Werner, *op. cit.*, 304-05.

42. *Ibid.*, 305-06.

43. Bryan to Murphree, Feb. 1, 1922, in Murphree-Bryan Correspondence, UF Archives. Lucius M. Bristol was Professor of sociology and in his unpublished manuscript, "Memoirs of a Yank" (Copy in UF Archives), 55-65, he discusses the problems of teaching at the University of Florida during this period.

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tion to the students in the University gymnasium. His talk, which he called "Tampering With the Mainspring," condemned the spirit of mind-worship which, he said, was threatening the universities of the country. This problem had not become quite so serious on southern campuses, he thought, as it was elsewhere in the country. An "hypothesis," according to Bryan's definition, was "a scientific equivalent for a guess," and if this was true then Darwin's hypothesis was not fact but only a guess. It was hardly, from Bryan's point of view, an acceptable substitute for the word of God. He told his student audience that Darwin's "guess" had "absolutely no evidence to support it," and that in all the fifty years of scientific research the evolutionists had "not yet been able to find one single instance of a change from one species to another."⁴⁴

Bryan seems to have carried his audience with him throughout the lecture. The students, according to a newspaper account, were "completely under his spell throughout the entire evening, laughing or serious, thoughtful or jubilant, just as he pleased. Applause interrupted the discourse throughout, and a 'long Gator' was lustily given at the end."⁴⁵ Bryan believed that President Murphree endorsed this stand on evolution, and he congratulated him on being "the head of a great university who has not been carried away by the ape theory."⁴⁶ Perhaps at the time he was remembering his dispute with the President of the University of Wisconsin who had said that Bryan's lectures were more likely to make atheists than believers.⁴⁷ The Great Commoner answered this with the claim that Wisconsin was teaching the theory that men had "brute blood" and were descended from apes.⁴⁸

Bryan kept Murphree informed of his plans to have the Florida legislature pass laws to prohibit teachings which were contrary to the Bible. Such legislation, Bryan thought, should "prohibit the teaching of atheism and agnosticism and teaching *as true, Darwinism or any other evolutionary hypothesis* that links

44. *The Alligator*, Feb. 24, 1922.

45. *Ibid.*

46. Bryan to Murphree, Feb. 1, 1922, in Murphree-Bryan Correspondence, UF Archives.

47. Merle Curti and Vernon Carstensen, *The University of Wisconsin, A History* (Madison, 1949), II, 134-35.

48. Werner, *op. cit.*, 301-02.

man in blood relationship with the animals below him.”⁴⁹ In a speech in Tallahassee, he denied that he was trying to “stifle freedom of conscience,” or curtail academic freedom. He said: “We only ask that if you will not permit Christianity to be taught in public schools that you do not allow the atheists, agnostics, or the Darwinists to spread their doctrine.”⁵⁰ With the passage of such legislation, Bryan’s agitation against teaching evolution in Florida schools subsided somewhat.

He gave a series of talks on the campus in February, 1924, including one on evolution. President Murphree said: “His foolish notions on evolution came in for a round, though he was not so bitter and not quite so unreasonable. Most of his talks were on Government, Economics, Public Speaking, Religion and the Bible.”⁵¹ Bryan actually knew very little about the technical aspects of evolution, and the Vice-President of the University said that he had “made himself ridiculous to the students.” It was agreed, however, that he was still an excellent speaker. His voice, according to the Vice-President, “was a musical instrument upon which he played with the superb skill of a great master.”⁵²

The most sensational publicity involving Bryan and the University came in 1924 when he was seeking election as a delegate to the national Democratic convention. Without warning or prior consultation, Bryan announced to the press on January 13, 1924, that he was planning to present Murphree as a candidate for nomination for the office of President of the United States.⁵³ More astonished than anyone else by the announcement was Murphree, who called it “a fiction. Nobody expects a Southern man to be nominated President, much less a Florida man.”⁵⁴

Various Florida newspapers reacted differently to Bryan’s announcement. Some considered it a joke, but others, like the Gainesville *Sun*, decided that Bryan was acting in good faith, and pointed out that “the mention of Dr. Murphree is no especial

49. Bryan to Murphree, April 20, 1923, in Murphree-Bryan Correspondence, UF Archives.

50. Miami *Daily Metropolis*, May 12, 1923, quoted in Mills, *op. cit.*, 40.

51. Murphree to E. C. Berk, Feb. 16, 1924, in Murphree Papers, UF Archives.

52. James M. Farr, “The Making of A University” (unpublished Ms. in University of Florida Archives), Chap. III, 41.

53. Miami *News Metropolis*, January 14, 1924; *Florida Times-Union*, January 14, 1924.

54. Murphree to Frank Spain, Jr., Jan. 31, 1924, in Murphree-Bryan Correspondence, UF Archives.

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compliment to him as though he were some obscure man who had been thus flattered. It is Mr. Bryan who is to be complimented.”⁵⁵ Most of Murphree’s friends refused to treat the matter seriously, and when they wrote him, humorously asking for cabinet posts or other political offices, he answered their requests in a similar vein. In writing to a friend, he said: “It is to laugh! I am sorry all this publicity has occurred. It has been a great embarrassment to me. All this is said to you in personal confidence, I don’t want to offend Mr. Bryan.”⁵⁶

Bryan’s fellow democrats regarded it as part of his plan to swing Alabama’s twenty-four votes from the wet Oscar Underwood to the dry and progressive President of the University of Florida.⁵⁷ Murphree, realizing this, commented: “It is, of course, his [Bryan] intention to support somebody from the South as against Mr. Underwood. It is not probable that any Southerner will be the nominee of the Democratic Party this year, much less a Floridian, but the goodwill of the Colonel is greatly appreciated, regardless of the impracticability of the suggestion.”⁵⁸

On February 24, 1924, Murphree announced that he was not a candidate and would not permit his name to appear on the state election ballot.⁵⁹ This action did not seem to alter Bryan’s original intention, and he announced that “no loyal Democrat could refuse the call, and I propose to submit his name to the national convention if I am elected a delegate from Florida.”⁶⁰ He seemed confident of Murphree’s success. “His chances,” he said, “are a great deal better than mine were six months before the Chicago convention of 1896, and they are better than President Wilson’s were two years before the convention of 1912.”⁶¹

Bryan campaigned strenuously, speaking in all but two counties, and in some counties he spoke as many as six times. He promised that if he were sent to the convention, no one would

55. Gainesville *Sun*, quoted in *Miami News Metropolis*, Jan. 22, 1924.

56. Murphree to Spright Dawell, Jan. 23, 1924, in Murphree Papers, UF Archives.

57. Paxten Hibben, *The Peerless Leader: William Jennings Bryan* (New York, 1929), 379.

58. Murphree to J. Archy Smith, Jan. 29, 1924, in Murphree-Bryan Correspondence, UF Archives.

59. *Florida Times-Union*, February 23, 1924.

60. *Miami News-Metropolis*, Feb. 25, 1924.

61. Letter from Bryan to Editor, *Tallahassee Dispatch*, quoted in Armstrong, *op. cit.*, 109.

"need ask where the Florida delegation is; they need but look where the fight is hottest."⁶²

Following the election, Dr. Murphree congratulated Bryan, who had won by a large majority:

What a rebuke your overwhelming vote was to certain interests! A little coterie of people would have given almost their very lives to keep you out of the Convention. Praise God, the forces of righteousness are marching! Your election was but a slight manifestation of Florida's deep gratitude to you for your service to the country and the reforms in government that you initiated almost single handed and alone.⁶³

The Democratic Convention of 1924 proved the most humiliating experience in Bryan's life. When he arose to explain why he was not supporting John W. Davis or Alfred E. Smith he was harshly booed. Hilarious cheers and loud applause greeted his announcement that this would probably be the last convention that he would attend as a delegate.⁶⁴ His voice was almost drowned out by jeers and hisses when he said that there were many available Southern candidates, including Murphree of Florida. Bryan's position and influence in the party had been destroyed. Weary, almost stumbling, taxed by the heat and crushed by the crowd's heckling, he descended from the platform. With tears in his eyes, he turned to Senator Heflin and admitted that he had never in his life been so humiliated.⁶⁵

A few weeks later, Murphree sent the following message to Bryan: "I appreciate your faithfulness and your friendship. The advertising that came to the University through your generous proposal concerning me has shown results in greatly increased correspondence with prospective Florida settlers from all sections of the United States."⁶⁶ From the University of Florida's point of view, Bryan's political activities at the convention had not been in vain.

His last formal appearance on the campus came in 1924 when he delivered a series of six lectures.⁶⁷ He spoke on gov-

62. *Miami Daily News and Metropolis*, April 23, 1923, quoted in Mills, *op. cit.*, 60-61.

63. Murphree to Bryan, June 16, 1924, in Murphree-Bryan Correspondence, UF Archives.

64. J. C. Long, *Bryan, The Great Commoner* (New York, 1928), 365-66.

65. Hofstadter, *op. cit.*, 200.

66. Murphree to Bryan quoted in Werner, *op. cit.*, 200.

67. Lecture program in Murphree Papers, UF Archives.

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ernment, which he defined as "the people at work"; money and its place and value in society; religion; and public speaking. St. Paul, Demosthenes, and Wendell Phillips were, in his opinion, the most effective speakers of all time. He used them as his models, he said, because these men had talked to the hearts of their audiences. "The head," according to Bryan, "doesn't mean anything except as an instrument to find an excuse for what the heart wants to do." The campus newspaper hailed Bryan, after his lectures, as America's greatest orator, and described him as the University's "whole hearted supporter and distinguished alumnus."⁶⁸

Murphree and Bryan continued their correspondence until the latter's death on July 26, 1925, in Dayton, Tennessee, the scene of the Scopes trial. On the afternoon of the day he died, Bryan completed a speech denouncing the Darwinian theory. He had labored over the details of that speech, and after much searching he had found the perfect note on which to end it:

Faith of our fathers - holy faith,
We will be true to Thee till death.⁶⁹

Bryan's passing was deeply mourned by his friends and supporters all over the world. On the campus of the University of Florida flags were flown at half-mast, and there was a special prayer service. In the first fall issue, 1925, of *The Alligator*, the following editorial appeared:

In the death of William Jennings Bryan . . . the University of Florida lost one of its truest and best friends, as well as one of its most influential and noted alumni. Some of us may have differed with him in his views at times, yet all pay him honor, and respect his memory as one of the greatest Americans. Mr. Bryan's sincerity and deep conviction in what he believed to be right is not to be doubted. His fearless and aggressive stand in the face of enemies will long serve as an example worthy of emulation by all Americans.⁷⁰

68. *The Alligator*, February 16, 1924.

69. Hibben, *op. cit.*, 405.

70. *The Alligator*, Sept. 27, 1925.