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Article Summary: Bryan's conduct during unofficial visits to Mexico followed a conventional diplomatic pattern. He said and did what his hosts expected. Questions arose in later years about his having praised Porfirio Diaz and visited a Mexican brewery.

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## WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN IN MEXICO

BY BOYD CARTER

“WHEN the Wilson administration took charge of the State Department, it found a number of questions left as a legacy by the preceding administration.” Among them was Mexico. Mrs. Bryan observed that: “Secretary Bryan was not illy prepared for this work, as in our three visits to Mexico he had learned to know the leading men; he understood the conditions of the country and the temperament of its inhabitants.”<sup>1</sup>

Bryan visited Mexico in 1897, 1900, and 1908—after each of his presidential defeats. The 1897 visit was reported in Nebraska newspapers.

A dispatch from Mexico City on December 17 reported that the Bryan party had visited several establishments that day, among which were the silk and chocolate factories. They also went to the American cemetery, which is the property of the United States Government.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mary Baird Bryan and William Jennings Bryan, *The Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan* (Philadelphia, 1925), p. 357.

<sup>2</sup> *Lincoln State Journal*, December 18, 1897.

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Under the heading, "Things Bryan Might Learn," bearing a Washington D. C. dateline, the following comment appeared:

Statesmen and financiers who are watching from this standpoint the tour of Mr. Bryan through Mexico are wondering whether he will discover any errors in his statements that he put forth last year in behalf of the Mexican system of finance which he asked the United States to adopt.

The story continued in a vein critical of Mexican finances and of Bryan's attitudes on silver.<sup>3</sup>

A story in the Omaha press under a December 15 dateline from Mexico City gave a day of Bryan's activities:

President Diaz today accorded an audience to Mr. Bryan and party. Mr. Bryan has been a busy man today, having visited the Cathedral and the Academy of Fine Arts. Tomorrow President Raoul of the Mexican National Railway gives him a dinner, and the party will visit the famous and magnificent church at Villa de Guadalupe, enshrining the miraculous image of the Virgin.<sup>4</sup>

*El Mundo*, one of the foremost illustrated reviews in Mexico, carried a piece entitled, "Mr. William J. Bryan and His Wife." This publication noted that "the famous patrician (patricio) of the American Democratic Party," the "leader from Nebraska," after visiting many of the most important cities and establishments of Mexico, was getting ready to return to his country. The writer noted that their visitor's heart is apparently filled with gratitude towards the Mexican people and their government for the hospitality and affection shown to him. He regrets that he didn't stay long enough to learn in detail about Mexico's social and political life, and about "our financial organization and the nature of our monetary system." The writer feels confident, however, that Bryan's "genius as a close observer and his analytical mind, had probably given him, as he (Bryan) says, sufficient data to form a clear picture of the country and the marvelous progress it was making."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, December 20, 1897.

<sup>4</sup> *Omaha Daily Bee*, December 16, 1897.

<sup>5</sup> *El Mundo Ilustrado*, Mexico City, December 26, 1897. From notes translated by the writer.

The apostle of silver obviously made a good impression on the citizens of the country of silver.

During his 1908 visit Bryan went to Monterrey. Again papers from his home state covered the visits well.

The *Lincoln Star* and the *Omaha Daily Bee* announced that the Bryans were going to Mexico for a rest and for recreation. On November 20, the *Daily Bee* carried a cartoon on the front page reproduced from the *Denver Post* that showed Bryan with his hand extended towards a Mexican and saying: "Howdy! Have you anything that would make a good issue in 1912?"

The *Omaha World-Herald* published a story with a Laredo, Texas dateline in which we learn that the Bryans were going to Monterrey, Mexico, to spend a few days as the guests of Colonel J. A. Robertson, proprietor of the *Monterrey News*. "Mr. Bryan plans to spend ten days in Monterrey, after which he will leave for a hunting trip along the lower Rio Grande, thence visiting Austin and Galveston. He will then return to Nebraska."<sup>6</sup>

The visit to Monterrey was also featured in the two leading Mexico City pictorial magazines: *El Mundo Ilustrado* (December 6, 1908) and *Arte y Letras* (December 13, 1908). A translation of the article in *El Mundo* follows:

For ten days the city of Monterrey was host to the illustrious defeated candidate in the last electoral campaign in the United States, Mr. William J. Bryan, who visited our country for the third time.

After his recent campaign, he wanted to rest and thought of our country, which on previous occasions has provided him such fine opportunities to relax. He crossed the Mexican frontier on November 20 and as soon as he stepped on Mexican territory he became the object of the kind of attention to which both his personal and political qualities entitle him.

As soon as it was learned that Mr. Bryan was in the vicinity of Monterrey, the American colony, businessmen

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<sup>6</sup> *Lincoln Star*, November 13, 1908; *Omaha Daily Bee*, November 14 and 20, 1908; *Omaha Morning World Herald*, November 22, 1908.

and the governor himself of Nuevo Leon, who is a personal friend of Mr. Bryan, arranged a brilliant reception for him. Upon his arrival in the city he stayed in the house of Colonel Robertson, director of the *Monterrey News*. He is an intimate friend of the Bryan family. Among the first to call at Colonel Robertson's home were the governor and his wife, a visit which was returned in the afternoon of the same day.

The American colony, with the consent of Mr. Bryan, arranged a program of entertainment in honor of the visitors to demonstrate their appreciation and esteem. After a day of rest at the beautiful estate, "Bella Vista," owned by Mr. Robertson, Mr. Bryan left for Aldamas accompanied by a group of expert marksmen, for the purpose of hunting ducks, but with the understanding that no politics would be talked.

Upon his return from the hunt, the great Democrat attended a Thanksgiving Day celebration at which he was named official speaker. The speech which he made on this occasion is a wonderful piece of oratory. He completely omitted all references to politics and demonstrated, as he has upon several occasions, his affection for our country and his interest in its development. The theme of his speech was co-operation. He dealt with this topic first by talking about individuals and concluded by relating his comments to the neighboring countries. He said that Americans of the United States make a mistake when they go to Europe. Instead they ought to come to Mexico, where they have as much to see and learn as in any of the countries to be found on the other side of the Atlantic. His speech, like all of the great statesman's speeches, was welcomed with great applause and demonstrations of sincere approval.

During the Thanksgiving celebration Mr. Bryan expressed his desire to be introduced to the principal businessmen of the city and to leading representatives of banking and commerce. This desire was expressed in the presence of the directors of the Cuauhtemoc brewery (*Cerveceria Cuauhtemoc*) and inasmuch as no locale lends itself as well to a meeting of businessmen as the afore-mentioned brewery, Messrs. Sada, with their customary courtesy, offered to arrange for Mr. Bryan to meet the persons in question in the plant where exquisite beers of national reputation are manufactured.

The invitation was accepted and the day set for the meeting was November 27. At 10:00 A.M. of that day all the men who represent the business activity of the city met at the brewery.

A few minutes later the guest of honor arrived at the brewery accompanied by Colonel Robertson and Mr. T. Ayres Robertson, vice consul general of the United States in Monterrey. Mr. Don Francisco G. Sada, manager of the brewery, introduced Mr. Bryan to the people who were present and who were the following: Messrs. Roberto Bremer, Engineer Francisco Beltran, Manuel Cantu Trevino, Engineer Nicolas L. Feilberg, Miguel Ferrara, Fernando de Fuentes, Jose L. Garza, Noe Garza, Jesus Gonzalez Trevino, Francisco J. Gonzalez, Jose J. Gonzalez, Ricardo M. Gonzalez, Jesus Maria Hinojosa, Felix Hoeck, Rafael H. Lillo, Salvador Madero, Eugenio G. Maillefert (representative of *El Mundo Ilustrado*), Ignacio Malo Best, Jose A. Muguerza, M. Muzquiz Blanco (reporter for the *Monterrey News*), Ricardo L. Ortiz, Valentin Rivero, Victor Rivero, Rodolfo J. Rodriguez, Ricardo Sada, Leon Signoret, Enrique Sada, Alberto Sada, Jesus Sada, Pablo Sagarra, Carlos Saavedra, Pablo Salas y Lopez, Daniel Salas y Lopez, Jesus Sandoval, Vicente Solis, Constantino de Tarnava, Ramon Yarla y B. H. Wright.

The inspection was thorough in nature although incomplete because of the lack of time. Each of the departments inspected solicited the careful attention of the visitor, who asked questions with the curiosity of a shrewd observer concerning the methods and manufacturing processes. He was shown the cooking departments, the refrigeration plant and the new department in which a large refrigerating plant, to be powered by three large electric generators, is being built; he visited the bottling department and the department of labeling and packing and the large four-storey steel building intended as a general storehouse for bottles. He was also shown the shipping department and the millhouse, seven storeys tall, as well as the ice plant.

The time had passed quickly and the visitors were beginning to feel the need to rest. With the consideration characteristic of the managers of the plant, they were invited to a champagne lunch, which was served in the spacious refectory of the cooking building.

The succulent foods and excellent service did honor to those in charge of the luncheon. When the time came to serve champagne, Mr. D. Francisco Sada, in a brief and effective speech, requested Colonel Robertson in the name of all those present and especially in the name of the business leaders, to inform Mr. Bryan how glad they were and how flattered they felt to have him with them.

Mr. Robertson is a fluent orator who has been applauded in public appearance on many occasions and therefore his speech was eloquent and filled with rhetorical flourishes which delighted his hearers.

In answer, Mr. Bryan took the floor and expressed himself as follows:

Gentlemen, although I cannot answer with the eloquence of Mr. Robertson, I can manifest to you my appreciation for the attention which has been shown me today and many courtesies which have been extended to Mrs. Bryan and me on this and previous visits.

For a long time I have been interested in the Republic of Mexico and this interest has increased with the visits which on different occasions I have made to this country.

I have always considered your president as one of the greatest statesmen in the world; because, taking into consideration the circumstances in which he has found himself and considering the initiatives he has undertaken, I do not feel that there is in the world in the present generation any man who occupies such a lofty position with greater claim to universal applause. I am glad I have the opportunity to praise him in this way because I believe that he deserves it. This is the opinion not only of persons who have seen his achievements at close range but also of those who have made casual visits to this country.

I made my first visit to this state eleven years ago, at which time I met General Reyes, who made the kind of impression upon me such as few men have made; and upon this new visit I greeted him again and it gives me satisfaction to see his ideas and those of other men and their enthusiastic labor directed towards constructing the base on which Mexican civilization is rising. I have great hope for the future of this country because you will become a strong people. I do not think I am mistaken in this belief. I am as certain about the future of this country as I am about that of my own country and of other republics in the world. I think this because the bonds of existing friendship between Mexico and the United States are becoming tighter and as the citizens of both nations recognize the closeness of these ties they will work together for the purpose of doing good. From the bottom of my heart I think, as Mr. Robertson does, that this country is now entering into a period of prosperity. I think that the well-being of all countries will increase a great deal even though particular circumstances

may temporarily retard their progress. One reason in particular induces me to believe this, namely that the leaders will facilitate the interchange of ideas in the world of politics among all nations.

The circulation of money is always an element in the medium of progress. Circumstances have changed during the last twelve or fifteen years, for before 1896 the value of the peso had been increasing and prices decreasing, a factor which was due to the increasing scarcity of money, because of the manner in which it was being produced. These conditions were so well known that three international congresses were called to which nations sent their representatives to study the problem of what could be done to save the world from a disaster. But providentially gold mines began to turn out a flood of yellow metal and today more money could be coined from the annual production of gold than could have been coined twelve years ago from the production of gold and silver. With such an increase in the monetary supply of the world, a solution was found for the industrial depression. During the last twelve years we have experienced an era of almost universal prosperity and I hope to see the industrial world develop and progress and I hope the supply of money meets the demand for all purposes. The way to continue this prosperous situation is to seek facilities to make money available and avoid decreases in prices. I am glad to see that Mexico is following the systems of other nations and is taking advantage of these universal conditions.

For several years I have noted that it is rather difficult to find a way of defining the word "civilization"; as for me, I would define it as the harmonious development of the human race in a physical, mental and moral manner, for there can be no complete civilization which does not encompass a moral, mental and physical development. A man who develops only physically is nothing but a brute; a man who develops only physically and mentally may end up accursed; but when a man develops strong in body and active in mind and at the same time educates his moral character, from him we can expect the greatest of things for the common good. (Applause)

I am speaking now to prosperous businessmen. And I must say that I have been judged badly when it has been said of me that I am not a friend of capital. I am a friend of everything that is just and good and I would never oppose the right to property, which is the basis of world progress. (Applause)

When a man occupies a political position, he can lay the foundation for beneficial relations among nations because in modern times all countries more than ever are interdependent. When a man enjoys prosperity, it is generally said that he possesses a fortunate independence; but this is a mistake because the greater the position of a person, the greater become his obligations and responsibilities. No one is independent; this country is dependent on ours. The United States is dependent upon and has serious obligations towards



yours, and all countries are mutually obligated to each other. The independence of a country is measured also by the intelligence of its rulers and by the progressive spirit of its citizens. I know no better way to judge nations than to apply to them the yardstick we use to measure individuals; and likewise I think it is advantageous to me if all my neighbors take advantage, to the extent possible, of their opportunities to enjoy greater prosperity. I also believe that it is beneficial to my country if all other countries profit by the most complete development of its resources. I cannot imagine any permanent good for my country which could be purchased at the expense of harm to another nation. I ardently want the United States to gain many rewards by doing many beneficial things for other countries. Such services can be rendered in different ways.

But there is one way we can at this time increase our usefulness to other countries. I think that our universities should pay more attention to the science of government and that we ought to bring students from all nations to our universities. These students, instructed in our theories of government and familiarized with our ideals and interests, would return to their homes, taking with them what is best about our fatherland and would use their knowledge thus obtained for the benefit of their own compatriots. In this way we would have friends in all countries and, having friends, we would be more secure than with armies and armadas. The American flag would no longer be looked upon as a symbol of war and of force but rather as the emblem of liberty, peace and justice.

No one among the people who live in Mexico desires more ardently than I the prosperity of this country and hopes with more zeal for success to crown its march into the future. There is no one either who rejoices more than I because of the progress which I feel with certainty this nation and its inhabitants will achieve. Gentlemen, I thank you.

The final words of the great orator were drowned in tremendous applause by the audience, which gave him an ovation of a kind which for a long time will be remembered because of the sincerity and enthusiasm which inspired it.

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Whereupon the fiesta ended that had brought together the prominent men in local society to pay a well-deserved tribute to the great Democrat and eminent statesman.

After this fiesta Mr. Bryan attended a function at the Juarez Theatre, in the course of which he received new demonstrations of the esteem which he has earned for himself among the inhabitants of the capital of the state of Nuevo Leon.

Ten days after his arrival in the city of Monterrey, Mr. Bryan left for the United States to merge himself in the multitude of hard-working citizens who contribute to the greatness of their country by means of their constant and assiduous labor.

On December 2 Mr. Bryan left Mexican territory; before again dedicating himself to his daily tasks he will go to hunt wild ducks on the King ranch in Texas. When he has rested up from his fatigue caused by the campaign which has just ended, he will return to his daily labors, bearing a grateful memory of his third visit to our country, a visit which has probably confirmed even more the ideas he has concerning our prosperity and our brilliant future.<sup>7</sup>

Under the circumstances, Bryan conducted himself as a consummate artist in diplomacy, indeed with so much artistry that a cynic might find grounds to accuse him of hypocrisy. In point of fact, it is rather difficult to reconcile the praise he loads on Don Porfirio Diaz, "as one of the greatest statesmen in the world" with his "cross of gold" politics. No New World ruler in the last century did more to press a "crown of thorns" down upon the brow of labor, than Don Porfirio, or set firmer brakes on the aspirations of the common man to participate in his government. How, then, could anyone except a person of utmost naivete say of a man like Diaz, "I do not feel that there is in the world in the present generation any man who occupies such a lofty position with greater claim to universal applause?"

This is even more surprising coming from a man admired and respected for his fight for political democracy and world peace and for his opposition to dollar diplomacy and imperialism.

Perhaps this praise of Don Porfirio before a group of businessmen who supported him should be construed as representing no more than Bryan's sense of courtesy as a sensitive guest in a foreign country. Certainly this interpretation can be defended within the general context of his speech. A distinguished visitor such as Bryan could hardly

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<sup>7</sup> *El Mundo Ilustrado*, December 6, 1908. Translation by the writer.

praise Mexico as a greater tourist attraction than Europe, define "civilization" in terms that would appeal to a Latin audience, talk international co-operation, advocate the good neighbor policy and student exchanges, affirm his belief that property "is the basis of world progress," praise the country's prosperity and progress, without putting in a word of praise for its President. Courtesy demanded that he say something diplomatic about him, but his statement was over enthusiastic.

Another aspect of the visit, contained in both the text and illustrations of the article was Mr. Bryan's visit to the brewery and attendance at the champagne luncheon. Mrs. Bryan has told us, "Mr. Bryan was a total abstainer throughout his entire life. His influence was always cast against the use of intoxicating liquor."<sup>8</sup>

In 1904 William Jennings Bryan had advocated local option. By 1908 (the date of his last visit to Mexico when the pictures below were taken showing him in front of the famous Monterrey brewery, "Cerveceria Cuauhtemoc," and inside the brewery at the champagne luncheon in his honor), he had moved to the position of advocating county option as the second stage in the "evolution" of his thinking on the matter. The third and fourth stages would involve his support for state and national prohibition.

Mrs. Bryan commented on the difficulty of enforcing local prohibition, and reviewed some of the means used by bootleggers to get beverages into dry counties. For example, when the sale of eggs and the number of funerals increased disproportionately in a dry county, it was discovered that the eggshells contained small bottles and the caskets big ones. She recalled that her husband, when accused by his opponents of violating states' rights and destroying the privacy of the individual in his battle against John Barleycorn, replied by using arguments such as the following: "Laws are made to protect society against bur-

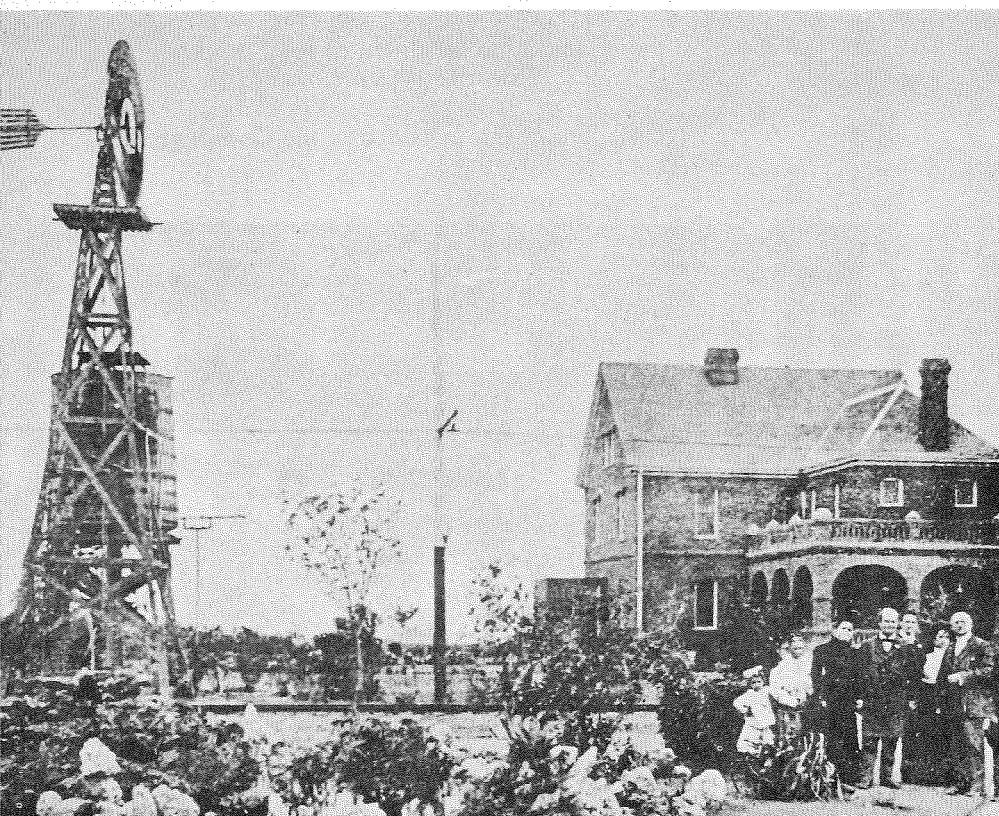
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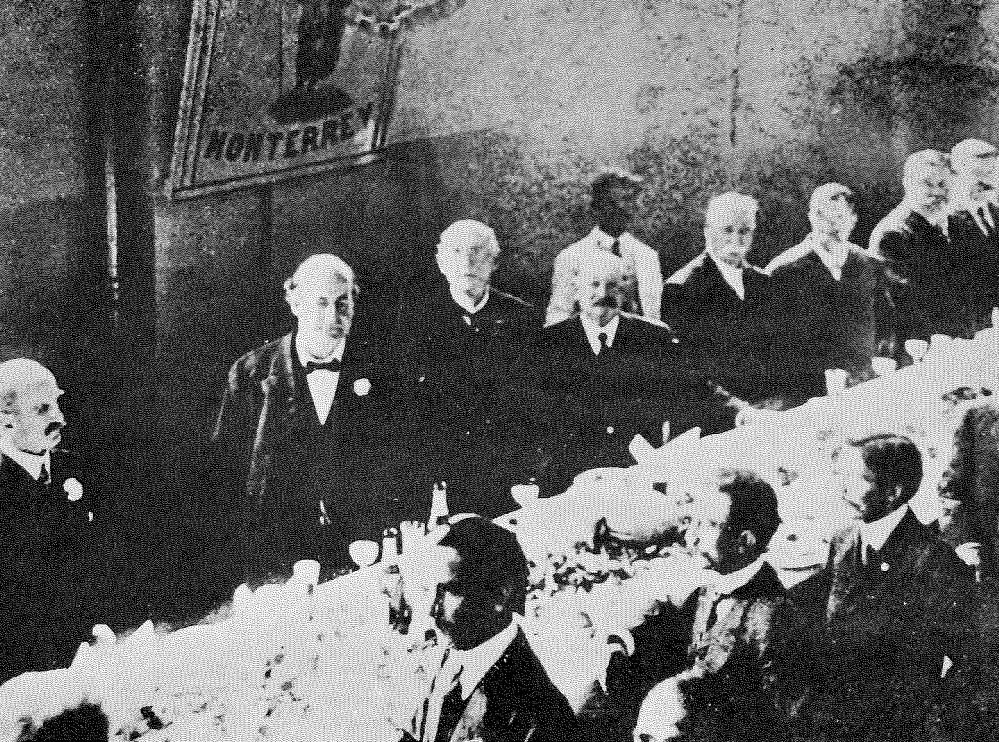
<sup>8</sup> Bryan, *op. cit.*, p. 466.



Above—The Bryan and Robertson families at the country home "Bellavista"

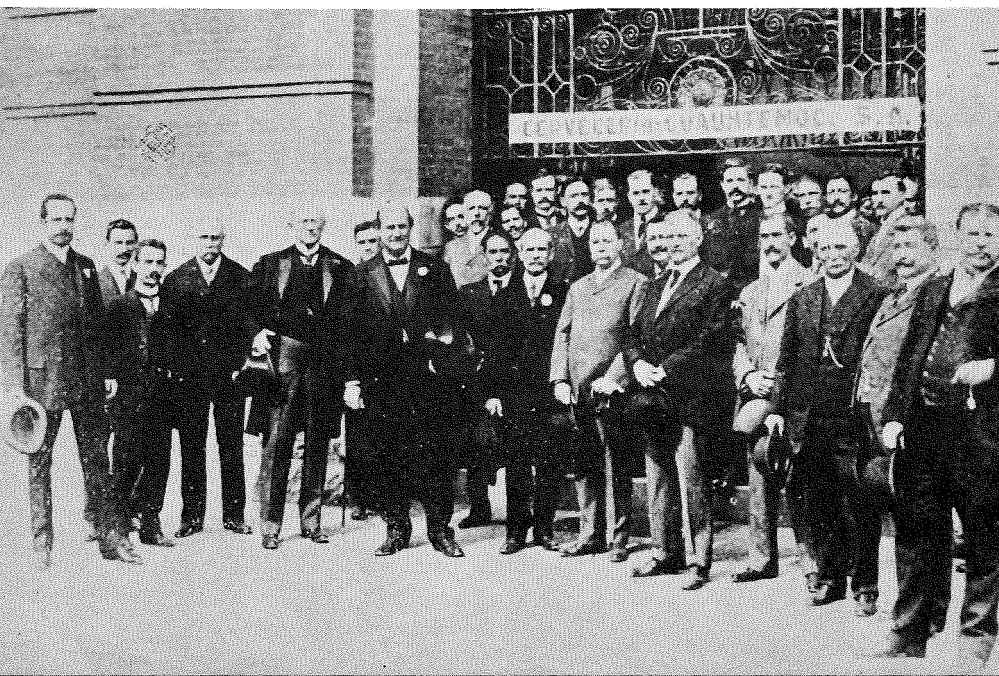
Below—Touring the property of Colonel Robertson.





Above—Bryan at the champagne luncheon at the Cuauhtemoc Brewery

Below—A group of visitors at the entrance of the Cuauhtemoc Brewery



glary which run counter to a man's right to enjoy a burglar's kit and a dark lantern."

Bryan hired a hall in Omaha to make a speech in defense of national prohibition. "Without a single companion he placed his coat and hat on a chair and stepping forward, made a graceful bow to his hat and coat and said: 'Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen.' The audience was delighted and the speech a success." (Nebraskans will recall that a somewhat similar technique was used by a successful candidate in a recent gubernatorial contest.)

Mrs. Bryan concludes her reference to her husband's participation in the drive for national prohibition with these remarks:

"Remember, this was back in 1908, long before nationwide prohibition had become a political issue. His retort to the liquor people in a published statement is worth quoting:

"'If the liquor interests can make good their threats to destroy me politically, my death will be a warning to the fathers and mothers of the power of this foe to the home and to American life.'"<sup>9</sup>

It is inconceivable that the Monterrey brewers were not well posted on Bryan's attitudes towards their business. It is, therefore, highly probable that the invitation extended to the Great Commoner to visit and to lunch in their brewery had behind it a wily motivation. If his enemies had come into possession of the photographs used with this article they could have used them perhaps with some success to cast doubt not only on the sincerity of his prohibition campaign but also on his own claims of being a teetotaler. It is a tribute to Bryan's sense of propriety and to his good sportsmanship that he would accept an invitation in the first place that had about it the flavor of a malicious prank. In the foreign view he would have acted with more dignity as Secretary of State had he observed like considerations of cosmopolitan tolerance and served

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 290-293.

his foreign guests at state dinners wines of exquisite vintage instead of grape juice.

On the whole, Bryan's conduct in Mexico followed a conventional diplomatic pattern. He did what he was supposed to do and said what he was supposed to say. He was well received there and there is no reason not to assume that he liked Mexico and that most of his comments, particularly those relating to the good neighbor policy, to student exchanges and to his confidence in Mexico's future, bear the stamp of genuine sincerity. It is, of course, ironical that six years later, as Secretary of State, he was confronted with the necessity to deal with the problems that Don Porfirio ("one of the greatest statesmen in the world") indirectly bequeathed him and to sanction the occupation of Veracruz. But even so, no more ironical perhaps than the spectacle of William Jennings Bryan inspecting a brewery and sitting at lunch at a table on which bottles and beer and wine glasses stand in serried ranks like "live" soldiers lined up for inspection.