

him famous and financially secure, and he stopped calling himself the Corrector. He began helping people in need (prisoners, destitute families), did a third edition, moved back to Aberdeen, drew up a will, and died while praying. His only personal bequest was to Christiana Blackwell, the daughter of an Aberdeen clergyman.

The question, then, is how Cruden's scholarship and productivity, and the diligence necessary to "unwrite" the Bible into index form, could have coexisted with insanity. Keay contends that he wasn't insane at all but the victim of a sequence of wrongful committals, all resulting from the first. She tries to fill in the biographical gaps. The first committal to a madhouse, she argues, must have been ordered by the clergyman father of Cruden's first love, to keep the shame

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of the girl's pregnancy by her brother secret, though Keay has no evidence of who the girl or her father was, or of whether Cruden knew she was pregnant. But

Keay thinks the episode shaped Cruden's life, so she identifies the girl by arguing that Christiana Blackwell's mother, Elizabeth, must also have been Christiana's father's sister. In this version, Cruden's first committal was fraudulent, his second the action of a jealous suitor, and his last that of a malevolent sister. And the more Cruden published and sued and argued that he was sane and the object of conspiracy, the crazier he seemed.

The story is plausible—psychiatric treatment was still in the age of leeches and bleeding, and committals and releases must have been frequently arbitrary. But it has too much unsupported guesswork, too many imagined motives and unlikely villains. Couldn't Cruden have been as insane as everyone said he was, but with an insanity that came and went—a condition that psychiatrists might recognize and diagnose today? Keay argues her version of Cruden's story intensely, but she doesn't claim certainty. Making up stories based on the little you know about other people is one of life's pleasures. This book is fun in the same way,

and so well written that the pages turn themselves. And whether or not Cruden was insane, his concordance has gone through some 60 editions and, 250 years later, is still in print.

—Ann Finkbeiner

## HISTORY

### Weapons of Fear

LIKE MANY OTHER JOURNALISTS, I covered the 2003 Iraq war with my gas mask close to hand. Fumbling it onto my face while dashing down to some Kuwaiti basement, or bundling it into a pillow to snatch some sleep inside Iraq, I came to see it as a constant part of life. But more than that, it was a talisman against the creeping fear of a most dreadful kind of war. The fear had to be taken seriously because Iraq had, in fact, used chemical weapons and nerve gas before—on its own Kurds at Halabja in March 1988, and against Iranian troops on the Al Faw peninsula the following month.

For all its psychological comfort, the gas mask would not have afforded much protection. Saddam Hussein favored the odorless sarin, a lethal nerve gas that had been developed by the IG Farben group in Nazi Germany. Like other classic nerve agents, sarin can be absorbed through the skin, causing convulsions, paralysis, and other symptoms, so for serious protection a full-scale protective suit of activated charcoal with sealed cuffs is required. This book begins with a chilling description of young recruits at the U.S. Army Chemical School in Missouri training in these "MOP suits," exposed to sarin and to a series called the V-agents, produced jointly by the British, Canadians, and Americans during the Cold War.

There remains a powerful taboo against the use of chemical weapons. Just as the Cold War was defined in one sense by the determination on both sides not to use nuclear weapons, our current war on terrorism will be shaped in large measure by

**WAR OF NERVES:**  
Chemical Warfare  
From World War I  
to Al Qaeda.

By Jonathan B. Tucker.  
Pantheon. 479 pp. \$30



In 2003, these U.S. Marines underwent chemical weapons training in Kuwait prior to the launching of the military strike against Iraq.

whether terrorists “graduate” from conventional explosives to the use of chemical and nerve agents. They are not, by comparison with nuclear weapons, all that difficult to produce, and their psychological effect can be devastating.

Jonathan Tucker, a specialist in chemical and biological weapons formerly with the U.S. government and more recently at the Monterey Institute, has produced a serious history of these weapons for the general reader. His title is something of a misnomer: There is relatively little about World War I. But he does note that by that war’s end about 10 percent of U.S. Army shells were chemical. This underestimates the significance they had taken on. By the late summer of 1918, the British were routing the German field army with barrages that used as many gas shells as high explosives, and, as minister of munitions, Winston Churchill had begun to triple gas output for the expected campaigns of 1919.

One of the victims of British gas, Tucker writes, was the young Adolf Hitler, who understandably developed an awed respect for the weapon. While

Hitler strongly supported the development of vast stocks of chemical weapons and nerve agents in World War II, he refrained from their use for fear of Allied retaliation. He was probably right to do so. The budget of the U.S. Army Chemical Warfare Service rose from \$2 million in 1940 to more than \$1 billion in 1942, and large stocks of mustard and phosgene gas were readied for use if Hitler ignored the clear warnings of massive retaliation from President Franklin Roosevelt.

Tucker’s excellent account shows how Allied intelligence failed to discover the extent of the German program and above all missed its technological breakthrough into nerve agents. Even when British Army intelligence sent back from North Africa a detailed report of the interrogation of a German officer with personal knowledge of the program, British officials took no action, although they were developing their own (inferior) agent, called DFP. After the Third Reich fell, the discovery of its chemical programs, and the realization that the Soviet Army had captured almost intact the Nazi nerve gas production center at Dyhernfurth (in what became East Germany), launched a chemical arms race that lasted throughout

the Cold War. Although some Soviet-produced chemical weapons were used by Egyptian forces in Yemen in the 1960s, the taboo against them broadly held—until the Iraqis broke it in 1988.

The taboo has now been largely reinstated by diplomacy and treaty, and even Saddam never actually used gas in the 2003 Iraq war, maybe because of the impact of international inspections in destroying Iraqi chemical warfare stocks and production facilities. But Tucker's study of the spasmodic progress of international conventions and the painfully slow destruction of the vast Cold War stocks in Russia and the United States does not make comforting reading. Perhaps that is why, like others who spent time in Iraq, I have not thrown away my gas mask.

—*Martin Walker*

## The People's Voice

THERE IS A TIDE IN THE AFFAIRS of politicians, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune. William Jennings Bryan (1860–1925) caught the tide in 1896 in the Chicago Coliseum, where the Democratic Party was in session to nominate its presidential candidate. Bryan was there as a 36-year-old Nebraska delegate. His career to that point, as Michael Kazin describes it in a new biography, had been interesting but not extraordinary. Bryan had been elected to the House of Representatives twice but defeated in a run for the Senate. Neither he nor the other delegates believed that he would leave the convention as the Democratic Party's nominee for the presidency.

Then it happened. The convention platform speakers were repeating themselves. The delegates were restless and bored. A journalist friend sitting nearby handed Bryan this note: "You have now the opportunity of your life. Make a big, broad, patriotic speech that will leave no taste of sectionalism in the mouth." Bryan scribbled a reply: "You will not be disappointed. . . . I will speak the sentiment of my heart and I think you will be satisfied."

In fact, Bryan stunned the delegates. His "Cross of

Gold" speech was a historic event, a ringing populist attack on the gold standard that was "crucifying" America's small farmers and laborers. Bryan owned one of the great political voices of all time: It rolled out to every corner of the hall with no need of artificial amplification. The words he spoke that day became a sort of cassette that he would play and replay hundreds of times all across the land, at good rates and before sellout crowds. Although he lost the election, he was forevermore the spokesman for a large and passionate constituency.

Kazin, a professor of history at Georgetown University and the author of a history of American populism, wishes to reclaim Bryan as a "godly" spokesman for a vanished combination of muscular economic populism and conspicuous Christian virtue. Bryan is remembered mostly for his disastrous role in the Scopes trial of 1925, but in the reform era of the 1890s to the 1920s, Kazin argues, only Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson had a greater impact on politics and political culture. Bryan championed the small farmers and wage earners and preached democracy, piety, and a belief in absolute moral values (though some of those "values," notably on race, were repellent). Politically, he combined the

**A GODLY HERO:**  
The Life of William  
Jennings Bryan.

By Michael Kazin.  
Knopf. 374 pp. \$30



William Jennings Bryan's electrifying "Cross of Gold" speech at the 1896 Democratic convention propelled him to the nomination.