

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.

appeal of Thomas Jefferson and the Bible, an unbeatable formula.

But of course it wasn't. The Democratic Party nominated Bryan for president twice more, in 1900 and in 1908, and twice more he lost. In 1912, Bryan saw in Woodrow Wilson a man of high religious purpose and gave Wilson his support at the Democratic convention. Wilson acknowledged Bryan's crucial help by naming him secretary of state, but Bryan resigned in 1915 over what he considered Wilson's overly aggressive handling of the sinking of the *Lusitania* by German torpedoes. Kazin says Bryan was quite happy to exchange the only powerful office he had ever held for a return to the lecture halls. He could add to his résumé that he was the man who had resigned from high office rather than compromise his principles.

Bryan contributed to many accomplishments now seen as progressive: He helped bring about the election of senators by popular vote and the establishment of a graduated income tax; he spoke for women's rights and labor's right to organize. Then he made the mistake of getting involved in the Scopes trial. He accepted an invitation to be called as a witness for the prosecution and to opine that every word of the Bible was factual. Clarence Darrow cross-examined him, and H. L. Mencken made fun of him, and he died shortly after the trial concluded.

Popular history, says Kazin, has unfairly embalmed Bryan in that trial. Kazin's effort to revive him and his reputation is only partly successful, but it tells a rollicking story and brings back the resonant echoes of a glorious political voice.

—Jacob A. Stein

## Italy's Fascist Mirage

SOMEWHERE AMONG THE family memorabilia there should be a 1939 photograph of me on a visit to Italy with my parents. I'm posing with members of the Italian Fascist youth movement outside Rome's Termini Station, watching a parade to welcome an

**MUSSOLINI'S ITALY:**  
Life Under the  
Fascist Dictatorship,  
1915–1945.

By R. J. B. Bosworth.  
Penguin Press.  
692 pp. \$35

arriving foreign dignitary (it could have been Hitler). Behind the group is a row of tanks, but even in the picture it's obvious that they are wooden replicas, no more menacing than carnival floats. From the distant station entrance, however, they would have looked impressively like the real thing.

As R. J. B. Bosworth makes plain in his massively researched study, this was Italian Fascism, a regime that slips and slides. Like the elusive image of a distant hill town shimmering in the heat of the Italian sun, it presents itself as a blend of characteristics—rhetoric, make-believe, feverish bursts of action, and violence. The challenge for the historian is to identify the fault lines between reality and the version that party ideologues said was reality, labeling it “the Italian truth,” which had to be accepted by every good citizen.

Bosworth, who has also written a prize-winning biography of Benito Mussolini, has produced what amounts to a collective biography of the Italians, spanning the 30-odd years of Fascist power. His finely detailed account (there are 88 pages of chapter notes) interweaves the experiences of ordinary Italians, foreigners living in Italy, Fascist party bosses, Mussolini's son-in-law Galeazzo Ciano, and, of course, Il Duce himself.

Ultimately, the book is about national self-delusion, culminating in the biggest delusion of all, one that led Italy disastrously into a world war for which it was neither militarily nor mentally prepared. (To illustrate its unprepared state, Bosworth points out that to go to war, Italy needed 150,000 tons of copper, but the nation produced only 1,000 annually.) In civil war-weary Spain, Francisco Franco, a much less charismatic and arguably nastier brand of Fascist, had a good excuse to resist German pressure to join the Axis, and he used it, ending up the darling of the United States. Mussolini's legacy, on the other hand, was a devastated country facing a long, painful road to recovery.

Fascist Italy was an empire of words. Yet one of its failures, as Bosworth points out, is that its rhetoric was

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