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Because William J. Bryan and Tom L. Johnson met at Chicago for a brief interview this week the newspapers rush to the conclusion that they were arranging for the Democratic nomination for president. In some instances it is even stated, though with the admission that the subject of the interview has not been disclosed, that Mr. Bryan pledged his support to Mr. Johnson.

Both gentlemen might be credited with much more common sense without doing either any injustice. It is not remarkable that they should arrange to meet each other, for they are personal friends. Neither is it remarkable that, having met, they should talk about politics; for they belong to the same political party and while differing in some respects are influenced by the same general ideals. But it would be remarkable if they had arranged a conference, two years in advance of the election, for the purpose of entering into pledges regarding the presidential nomination. Not only would it be remarkable, but it is no betrayal of confidence, even if there were any confidence for betrayal, to say that they made no such extraordinary arrangement. Mr. Bryan is not the man to give personal pledges in politics for personal reasons, and Mr. Johnson is not the man to solicit them. Were it otherwise, neither is so impoverished as to resources that he would plan a hurried meeting, a sort of catch-as-catch-can affair, as the occasion for entering into an alliance.

One of the false assumptions about Bryan is that he is a peanut politi-

cian, seeking whom he can put into office when he cannot put himself there. In truth, probably no public man thinks less than he about public office for its own sake. He has never thrust himself forward as a candidate, both of his nominations having come to him literally unsolicited; and if, in 1904, things remain as they are he will not be a candidate then. Only in the event of a recurrence of "hard times," attributed by the public to financial conditions, would he be the standard bearer of the Democracy in 1904. Even in that event his inevitable candidacy would not be of his own seeking. He would be the candidate then because those members of the Democratic party who furnish its votes, as distinguished from those who now and then furnish it with campaign funds, would not tolerate any other nomination. If this contingency does not arise, some other nomination will doubtless be made, but Mr. Bryan would not assume to dictate it. It is grossly unfair to him to suspect that he would, for he has done nothing to justify such a suspicion. That he would oppose nominations hostile to the essential principles of democracy, in which he believes, is doubtless true. He is already doing that. He certainly could not stand silently by while plutocrats disguised as Democrats were foisted into positions of supreme leadership in the party. But just as certainly he would not become a partisan of any person against others whom he regarded as also genuine Democrats. It would not be good policy to do so, for one thing; and, for another, it would not be in keeping with his real ambitions in politics, which are not personal success but democratic progress.

And even if Bryan were a different

kind of man it would be a false assumption to suppose that Tom L. Johnson would solicit him to do so impolitic and vain a thing. The presidential office is such a distinguished honor that it is difficult to realize that any public man can regard it as a secondary consideration in his career, and it must be confessed that few men do. Yet Mr. Johnson, as well as Mr. Bryan, would be better understood by the newspapers, and the significance of their movements and what they say could be more correctly interpreted, if the fact were accepted, as fact it is, that neither is playing for the presidency either for himself or for some personal favorite. Mr. Bryan is editing a paper which is devoted to democratic doctrine, as he conceives it, and not to office seeking; while Mr. Johnson is shaping the affairs of the city of which he is mayor, and influencing the affairs of the state whose laws control it, with reference to democratic principles as they appeal to him. Each is exemplifying his democracy within the sphere of his own present public duties, without reference to the effect upon his own personal or political fortunes. These facts are well known, and the sincerity of the men is not doubted except by persons who have become tainted with the prevailing notion, so commonly exemplified in practice, that public office is a public reward to be sought for instead of a call to service, and who judge the motives of others by their own low standards. It should be easy to infer, then, that many political subjects of national scope and national interest might prompt a hurried conference, such as that which took place this week between the editor of the Commoner and the mayor of Cleveland, without the slightest regard for the possibilities or personal preferences of either with reference to the next presidency.