CHAPTER LIX

PARTY ORGANIZATIONS

The Americans are, to use their favourite expression, a highly executive people, with a greater ingenuity in inventing means, and a greater promptitude in adapting means to an end, than any European race. Nowhere are large undertakings organized so skilfully; nowhere is there so much order with so much complexity; nowhere such quickness in correcting a suddenly discovered defect, in supplying a suddenly arisen demand.

Government by popular vote, both local and national, is older in America than in continental Europe. It is far more complete than even in England. It deals with larger masses of men. Its methods have engaged a greater share of attention, and enlisted more inventive skill in their service, than anywhere else in the world. They have therefore become more elaborate and, so far as mere mechanism goes, more perfect than elsewhere.

The greatest discovery ever made in the art of war was when men began to perceive that organization and discipline count for more than numbers. This discovery gave the Spartan infantry a long career of victory in Greece, and the Swiss infantry a not less brilliant renown in the later Middle Ages. The Americans made a similar discovery in politics some fifty or sixty years ago. By degrees, for even in America great truths do not burst full-grown upon the world, it was perceived that the victories of the ballot-box, no less than of the sword, must be won by the cohesion and disciplined docility of the troops, and that these merits can only be secured by skilful organization and long-continued training. Both parties flung themselves into the task, and the result has been an extremely complicated system of party machinery, firm yet flexible, delicate yet quickly set up and capable of working well in the roughest communities. Strong necessity, long practice, and the

fierce competition of the two great parties, have enabled this executive people to surpass itself in the sphere of electioneering politics. Yet the principles are so simple that it will be the narrator's fault if they are not understood.

One preliminary word upon the object of a party organization. To a European politician, by which I mean one who knows politics but does not know America, the aims of a party organization, be it local or general, seem to be four in number —

Union — to keep the party together and prevent it from wasting its strength by dissensions and schisms.

Recruiting — to bring in new voters, *e.g.* immigrants when they obtain citizenship, young men as they reach the age of suffrage, new-comers, or residents hitherto indifferent or hostile.

Enthusiasm — to excite the voters by the sympathy of numbers and the sense of a common purpose, rousing them by speeches or literature.

Instruction — to give the voters some knowledge of the political issues they have to decide, to inform them of the virtues of their leaders, and the crimes of their opponents.

These aims, or at least the first three of them, are pursued by the party organizations of America with eminent success. But they are less important than a fifth object which has been little regarded in Europe, though in America it is the mainspring of the whole mechanism. This is the selection of party candidates; and it is important not only because the elective places are far more numerous than in any European country, but because they are tenable for short terms, so that elections frequently recur. Since the parties, having of late had no really distinctive principles, and therefore no well-defined aims in the direction of legislation or administration, exist practically for the sake of filling certain offices, and carrying on the machinery of government, the choice of those members of the party whom the party is to reward, and who are to strengthen it by the winning of the offices, becomes a main end of its being.

There are three ways by which in self-governing countries candidates may be brought before electors. One is for the candidate to offer himself, appealing to his fellow-citizens on the strength of his personal merits, or family connections, or

wealth, or local influence. This was the practice in most English constituencies till our own time; and seems to be the practice over parliamentary Europe still. It was not uncommon in the Southern States before the Civil War. Another is for a group or junto of influential men to put a candidate forward, intriguing secretly for him or openly recommending him to the electors. This also largely prevailed in England, where, in counties, four or five of the chief landowners used to agree as to the one of themselves who should stand for the county, or perhaps chose the eldest son of a duke or marquis as the person whom rank designated.[1] So in Scotch burghs a knot of active bailies and other citizens combined to bring out a candidate, but generally kept their action secret, for "the clique" was always a term of reproach. The practice is common in France now, where the committees of each party recommend a candidate.

The third system is that in which the candidate is chosen neither by himself nor by the self-elected local group, but by the people themselves, *i.e.* by the members of a party, whether assembled in mass or acting through representatives chosen for the purpose. This plan offers several advantages. It promises to secure a good candidate, because presumably the people will choose a suitable man. It encourages the candidate, by giving him the weight of party support, and therefore tends to induce good men to come forward. It secures the union of the party, because a previous vote has determined that the candidate is the man whom the majority prefer, and the minority are therefore likely, having had their say and been fairly outvoted, to fall into line and support him. This is the system which now prevails from Maine to California, and is indeed the keystone of trans-atlantic politics. But there is a further reason for it than those I have mentioned.

That no American dreams of offering himself for a post unless he has been chosen by his party, or some section thereof, is due not to the fact that few persons have the local pre-eminence which the social conditions of Europe bestow on the

[1] Thus in Mr. Disraeli's novel of *Tancred* the county member, a man of good birth and large estates, offers to retire in order to make room for the eldest son of the Duke when he comes of age. This would not happen nowa-days, unless of course the duke were a party leader, and the county member desired to be rewarded by a peerage.

leading landowners of a neighbourhood, or on some great merchants or employers in a town, nor again to the modesty which makes an English candidate hesitate to appear as a candidate for Parliament until he has got up a requisition to himself to stand, but to the notion that the popular mind and will are and must be all in all, that the people must not only create the office-bearer by their votes, but even designate the persons for whom votes may be given. For a man to put himself before the voters is deemed presumptuous, because an encroachment on their right to say whom they will even so much as consider. The theory of popular sovereignty requires that the ruling majority must name its own standard-bearers and servants, the candidates, must define its own platform, must in every way express its own mind and will. Were it to leave these matters to the initiative of candidates offering themselves, or candidates put forward by an unauthorized clique, it would subject itself to them, would be passive instead of active, would cease to be worshipped as the source of power. A system for selecting candidates is therefore not a mere contrivance for preventing party dissensions, but an essential feature of matured democracy.

It was not however till democracy came to maturity that the system was perfected. As far back as the middle of last century it was the custom in Massachusetts, and probably in other colonies, for a coterie of leading citizens to put forward candidates for the offices of the town or colony, and their nominations, although clothed with no authority but that of the individuals making them, were generally accepted. This lasted on after the Revolution, for the structure of society still retained a certain aristocratic quality. Clubs sprang up which, especially in New York State, became the organs of groups and parties, brought out candidates, and conducted election campaigns; while in New England the clergy and the men of substance continued to act as leaders. Presently, as the democratic spirit grew, and people would no longer acquiesce in self-appointed chiefs, the legislatures began to be recognized as the bodies to make nominations for the higher Federal and State offices. Each party in Congress nominated the candidate to be run for the presidency, each party in a State legislature the candidate for governor, and often for other places also.

This lasted during the first two or three decades of the present century, till the electoral suffrage began to be generally lowered, and a generation which had imbibed Jeffersonian principles had come to manhood, a generation so filled with the spirit of democratic equality that it would recognize neither the natural leaders whom social position and superior intelligence indicated, nor the official leadership of legislative bodies. As party struggles grew more bitter, a party organization became necessary, which better satisfied the claims of petty local leaders, which knit the voters in each district together and concentrated their efforts, while it expressed the absolute equality of all voters, and the right of each to share in determining his candidate and his party platform. The building up of this new organization was completed for the Democratic party about the year 1835, for the Whig party not till some years later. When the Republican party arose about 1854, it reproduced so closely, or developed on lines so similar, the methods which experience had approved, that the differences between the systems of the two great parties are now unimportant, and may be disregarded in the sketch I have to give. It is not so much these differences as the variations between the arrangements in cities and those in rural districts as well as between the arrangements in different "Sections" of the country, that make it hard to present a perfectly accurate and yet concise description.

The essential feature of the system is that it is from bottom to top strictly representative. This is because it has power, and power can flow only from the people. An organization which exists, like the political associations of Britain, solely or mainly for the sake of canvassing, conducting registration, diffusing literature, getting up courses of lectures, holding meetings and passing resolutions, has little or no power. Its object is to excite, or to persuade, or to manage such business as the defective registration system of the country leaves to be fulfilled by voluntary agencies. So too in America the committees or leagues which undertake to create or stimulate opinion have no power, and need not be strictly representative. But when an organization which the party is in the habit of obeying, chooses a party candidate, it exerts power, power often of the highest import, because it practically narrows the choice of a party, that is, of about a half of the people, to one par-

ticular person out of the many for whom they might be inclined to vote.[1] Such power would not be yielded to any but a representative body, and it is yielded to the bodies I shall describe because they are, at least in theory, representative, and are therefore deemed to have the weight of the people behind them.

[1] The rapid change in the practice of England in this point is a curious symptom of the progress of democratic ideas and usages there. As late as the general elections of 1868 and 1874, nearly all candidates offered themselves to the constituency, though some professed to do so in pursuance of requisitions emanating from the electors. In 1880 many—I think most—Liberal candidates in boroughs, and some in counties, were chosen by the local party associations, and appealed to the Liberal electors on the ground of having been so chosen. In 1885 and again in 1892, all or nearly all new Liberal candidates were so chosen, and a man offering himself against the nominee of the association was denounced as an interloper and traitor to the party. The same process has been going on in the Tory party, though more slowly. The influence of the locally wealthy, and also that of the central party office, is somewhat greater among the Tories, but in course of time choice by representative associations will doubtless become the rule.