

CHAPTER LXVIII

THE WAR AGAINST BOSSDOM

It must not be supposed the inhabitants of Ring-ruled cities tamely submit to their tyrants. The Americans are indeed, what with their good nature and what with the preoccupation of the most active men in their private business, a long-suffering people. But patience has its limits, and when a Ring has pushed paternal government too far, an insurrection may break out. Rings have generally the sense to scent the coming storm, and to avert it by making two or three good nominations, and promising a reduction of taxes. Sometimes, however, they hold on their course fearless and shameless, and then the storm breaks upon them.

There are several forms which a reform movement or other popular rising takes. The recent history of great cities supplies examples of each. The first form is an attack upon the primaries. They are the key of a Ring's position, and when they have been captured their batteries can be turned against the Ring itself. When an assault upon the Bosses is resolved upon, the first thing is to form a committee. It issues a manifesto calling on all good citizens to attend the primaries of their respective wards, and there vote for delegates opposed to the Ring. The newspapers take the matter up, and repeat the exhortation. As each primary is held, on the night fixed by the ward committee of the regular (that is the Ring) organization, some of the reformers appear at it, and propose a list of delegates, between whom and the Ring's list a vote of the members of the primary is taken. This may succeed in some of the primaries, but rarely in a majority of them; because (as explained in a previous chapter) the rolls seldom or never include the whole party voters of the ward, having been prepared by the professionals in their own interest. Sometimes

only one-fourth or one-fifth of the voters are on the primary roll, and these are of course the men on whom the Ring can rely. Hence, even if the good citizens of the district, obeying the call of patriotism and the Reform Committee, present themselves at the primary, they may find so few of their number on the roll that they will be outvoted by the ringsters. But the most serious difficulty is the apathy of the respectable, steady-going part of the population to turn out in sufficient numbers. They have their engagements of business or pleasure to attend to, or it is a snowy night and their wives persuade them to stay indoors. The well-conducted men of small means are an eminently domestic class, who think they do quite enough for the city and the nation if they vote at the polls. It is still more difficult to induce the rich to interest themselves in confessedly disagreeable work. They find themselves at a primary in strange and uncongenial surroundings. Accustomed to be treated with deference in their counting-house or manufactory, they are jostled by a rough crowd, and find that their servants or workmen are probably better known and more influential than they are themselves. They recognize by sight few of the persons present, for, in a city, acquaintance does not go by proximity of residence, and are therefore at a disadvantage for combined action, whereas the professional politicians are a regiment where every private in each company knows his fellow-private and obeys the officers. Hence, the best, perhaps the only chance of capturing a primary is by the action of a group of active young men who will take the trouble of organizing the movement by beating up the members of the party who reside in the district, and bearding the local bosses in the meeting. It is a rough and toilsome piece of work, but young men find a compensation in the fun which is to be had out of the fight; and when a victory is won, theirs is the credit. To carry a few primaries is only the first step. The contest has to be renewed in the convention, where the odds are still in favour of the professionals, who "know the ropes" and may possibly outwit even a majority of Reform delegates. The managing committee is in their hands, and they can generally secure a chairman in their interests. Experience has accordingly shown that this method of attacking the Machine very rarely succeeds; and though the duty of attending the pri-

maries continues to be preached, the advice shares the fate of most sermons. Once in a way, the respectable voter will rouse himself, but he cannot be trusted to continue to do so year after year. He is like those citizen-soldiers of ancient Greece who would turn out for a summer inroad into the enemy's country, but refused to keep the field through the autumn and winter.

A second expedient, which may be tried instead of the first, or resorted to after the first has been tried and failed, is to make an independent list of nominations and run a separate set of candidates. If this strategy be resolved on, the primaries are left unheeded; but when the election approaches, a committee is formed which issues a list of candidates for some or all of the vacant offices in opposition to the "regular" list issued by the party convention, and conducts the agitation on their behalf. This saves all trouble in primaries or conventions, but involves much trouble in elections, because a complete campaign corps has to be organized, and a campaign fund raised.¹ Moreover, the average voter, not having followed politics closely enough to comprehend his true duty and interest, and yielding to his established party habits, inclines, especially in State and Federal elections, to vote the "regular ticket." He starts with a certain prejudice against those who are "troubling Israel" by dividing the party, because he sees that in all probability the result will be not to carry the Independent ticket, but to let in the candidates of the opposite party. Hence the bolting Independents can rarely hope to carry with them enough of their own party to enable them to win the election. The result of their action will rather be to bring in the candidates of the other side, who may be no better than the men on the ticket of their own Ring. Accordingly, reformers have become reluctant to take this course, for

¹ "To run an anti-machine candidate for mayor it is necessary to organize a new machine at an expense of from \$60,000 to \$100,000 (£12,000 to £20,000), with a chance of his being 'sold out' then by the men who are hired to distribute his ballots."—Mr. J. R. Bishop in a paper on "Money in City Elections," written in 1887. Now that the new laws of most States provide for official voting papers, the last mentioned risk has disappeared, but the expense of getting up a new election organization is still heavy. Some one has said that the difference between running as a regular candidate and running on your own account as an independent candidate, is like the difference between travelling by railway and making a new railway of your own to travel by.

though it has the merit of relieving their feelings, it exposes them to odium, involves great labour, and effects nothing more than may be obtained by one or other of the two methods which I have next to describe.

The third plan is to abstain from voting for the names on your party ticket to whom you object. This is Scratching. You are spared the trouble of running candidates of your own, but your abstention, if the parties are nearly balanced, causes the defeat of the bad candidates whom your own party puts forward, and brings in those of the other party. This is a good plan when you want to frighten a Ring, and yet cannot get the more timid reformers to go the length of voting either an independent ticket or the ticket of the other party. It is employed when a Ring ticket is not bad all through, but contains some fair names mingled with some names of corrupt or dangerous men. You scratch the latter and thereby cause their defeat; the others, receiving the full strength of the party, are carried.

If, however, indignation against a dominant Ring has risen so high as to overcome the party predilections of ordinary citizens, if it is desired to administer condign and certain punishment to those who have abused the patience of the people, the reformers will take a more decided course. They urge their friends to vote the ticket of the opposite party, either entire or at least all the better names on it, thus ensuring its victory. This is an efficient method, but a desperate one, for you put into power a Ring of the party which you have been opposing all your life, and whose members are possibly quite as corrupt as those of the Ring which controls your own party. The gain you look for is not therefore the immediate gain of securing better city government, but the ultimate gain of raising the general practice of politics by the punishment of evil-doers. Hence, whenever there is time to do so, the best policy is for the reformers to make overtures to the opposite party, and induce them by the promise of support to nominate better candidates than they would have nominated if left to themselves. A group of Bolters afraid of being called traitors to their party, will shrink from this course; and if they are weak in numbers, their approaches may be repulsed by the opposition. But the scheme is always worth trying, and has

several times been crowned with success. By it the reforming party among the Democrats of Baltimore recently managed to defeat their Ring in an election of judges. They settled in conference with the Republicans a non-partisan ticket, which gave the Republicans (who were a minority) a better share of the bench than they could have got by fighting alone, and which substituted respectable Democrats for the objectionable names on the regular Democratic ticket. A similar combination of the reform Republicans in Philadelphia with the Democrats, who in that city are in a permanent minority, led to the defeat of the Republican Gas Ring (whereof more in a later chapter). This method has the advantage of saving expense, because the bolters can use the existing machinery of the opposite party, which organizes the meetings and circulates the literature. It is on the whole the most promising strategy, but needs tact as well as vigour on the part of the Independent leaders. Nor will the opposite party always accept the proffered help. Sometimes it fears the gifts of the Greeks. Sometimes it hopes to win unhelped, and therefore will not sacrifice any of its candidates to the scruples of the reformers. Sometimes its chiefs dislike the idea of reform so heartily as to prefer defeat at the hands of a Ring of the other party to a victory which might weaken the hold of professionals upon the Machine and lead to a general purification of politics.

If the opposite party refuses the overtures of the reformers who are "kicking" against their own Machine, or will not purify the ticket sufficiently to satisfy them, there remains the chance of forming a third party out of the best men of both the regular organizations, and starting a third set of candidates. This is an extension and improvement of the second of the four enumerated methods, and has the greater promise of success because it draws votes from both parties instead of from one only. It has been frequently employed of late years in cities, generally of the second order, by running what is called a "Citizens' Ticket."

Of course bolters who desert their own party at a city election do not intend permanently to separate themselves from it. Probably they will vote its ticket at the next State or presidential election. Their object is to shake the power of their local boss, and if they cannot overthrow the Ring, at least to

frighten it into better behaviour. This they often effect. After the defeat of some notorious candidates, the jobs are apt to be less flagrant. But such repentances are like those of the sick wolf in the fable, and experience proves that when the public vigilance has been relaxed, the ringsters of both parties return to their wallowing in the mire.

The difficulties of getting good citizens to maintain a steady war against the professionals have been found so great, and in particular the attempt to break their control of the primaries has so often failed, that remedies have been sought in legislation. Not a few States have extended the penalties attached to bribery and frauds at public elections to similar offences committed at primaries and nominating conventions, deeming these acts to be, as in fact they are, scarcely less hurtful to the community when practised at purely voluntary and private gatherings than when employed at elections, seeing that the average electors follow the regular nomination like so many sheep: it is the candidate's party label, not his own character, that is voted for. Statutes have also been passed in some States for regulating the proceedings at primaries. For instance, Ohio provides that a certain notice shall be published of the holding of a primary; that judges, clerks, and supervisors of the election of delegates shall be sworn; that any qualified elector may challenge any one claiming to vote; that the asking, or giving, or taking a bribe, or an attempt to intimidate, shall be punishable offences, and disqualify the offending party from voting. Similar provisions protect the delegate to a convention from the candidate, the candidate from the delegate, and the party from both. Minnesota lately enacted a set of even more stringent regulations, making the annulment or destruction of any ballots cast at a party meeting held for the purpose of choosing either candidates or delegates, or the wrongfully preventing persons from voting who are entitled to vote, or personation, or "any other fraud or wrong tending to defeat or affect the result of the election," a misdemeanour punishable by a fine not exceeding \$3000, or three years' imprisonment, or both penalties combined.¹ Astonishing as it seems to a European that legislation should not

¹ Statutes of Minnesota of 1887, Chapter IV. §§ 99-105. It is significant that these sections apply only to cities of 5000 inhabitants or upwards.

only recognize parties, but should actually attempt to regulate the internal proceedings of a political party at a perfectly voluntary gathering of its own members, a gathering whose resolutions no one is bound to obey or regard in any way, some of the wisest American publicists conceive that this plan offers the best chance of reforming the Machine and securing the freedom of the voter. Not much success has been hitherto attained; but the statutes have, in some cases (*e.g.* California), been expressed to apply only where the political party seeks to apply them, and the experiment has not been tried long enough to enable a judgment on it to be formed. That it should be tried at all is a phenomenon to be seriously pondered by those who are accustomed to point to America as the country where the principle of leaving things alone has worked most widely and usefully; and it is the strongest evidence of the immense vigour of these party organizations, and of the authority their nominations exert, that reformers, foiled in the effort to purify them by voluntary action, should be driven to invoke the arm of the law.

The struggle between the professional politicians and the reformers has been going on in the great cities, with varying fortune, for the last twenty years. As illustrations of the incidents that mark it will be found in subsequent chapters, I will here say only that in the onslaughts on the Rings, which most elections bring round, the reformers, though they seldom capture the citadel, often destroy some of the outworks, and frighten the garrison into a more cautious and moderate use of their power. After an election in which an "Independent ticket" has received considerable support, the bosses are disposed to make better nominations, and, as an eminent New York professional (the late Mr. Fernando Wood) said, "to pander a little to the moral sense of the community." Every campaign teaches the reformers where the enemy's weak points lie, and gives them more of that technical skill which has hitherto been the strength of the professionals. It is a warfare of volunteers against disciplined troops, but the volunteers, since they are fighting for the taxpayers at large, would secure so great a preponderance of numbers, if they could but move the whole body of respectable citizens, that their triumph will evidently depend in the long run upon their own constancy and earnest-

ness. If their zeal does not flag; if they do not suffer themselves to be disheartened by frequent repulses; if, not relying too absolutely on any one remedy, they attack the enemy at every point, using every social and educational as well as legal appliance, the example of their disinherited public spirit, as well as the cogency of their arguments, cannot fail to tell on the voters; and no Boss, however adroit, no Ring, however strongly entrenched, will be able to withstand them. The war, however, will not be over when the enemy has been routed. Although much may be done by legislative remedies, such as new election laws, new provisions against corruption, a reconstruction of the frame of city government, and a purification of the civil service, there are certain internal and, so to speak, natural causes of mischief, the removal of which will need patience and unremitting diligence. In great cities—for it is throughout chiefly of cities that we have to think—a large section of the voters will, for many years to come, be comparatively ignorant of the methods of free government which they are set to work. They will be ignorant even of their own interests, failing to perceive that wasteful expenditure injures those who do not pay direct taxes, as well as those who do. Retaining some of the feelings which their European experience has tended to produce, they will distrust appeals coming from the more cultivated classes, and be inclined to listen to loose-tongued demagogues. Once they have joined a party they will vote at the bidding of its local leaders, however personally unworthy.¹ While this section remains numerous, Rings and

¹ Says Mr. Roosevelt: "Voters of the labouring class in the cities are very emotional: they value in a public man what we are accustomed to consider virtues only to be taken into account when estimating private character. Thus if a man is open-handed and warm-hearted, they consider it as being a fair offset to his being a little bit shaky when it comes to applying the eighth commandment to affairs of State. In the lower wards (of New York City), where there is a large vicious population, the condition of politics is often fairly appalling, and the [local] boss is generally a man of grossly immoral public and private character. In these wards many of the social organizations with which the leaders are obliged to keep on good terms are composed of criminals or of the relatives and associates of criminals. . . . The president of a powerful semi-political association was by profession a burglar, the man who received the goods he stole was an alderman. Another alderman was elected while his hair was still short from a term in the State prison. A school trustee had been convicted of embezzlement and was the associate of criminals."—*Century Magazine* for Nov. 1886.

Bosses will always have materials ready to their hands. There is, however, reason to expect that with the progress of time this section will become relatively smaller. And even now, large as it is, it could be overthrown and bossdom extirpated, were the better citizens to maintain unbroken through a series of elections that unity and vigour of action of which they have at rare moments, and under the impulse of urgent duty, shown themselves capable. In America, as everywhere else in the world, the commonwealth suffers more often from apathy or shortsightedness in the upper classes, who ought to lead, than from ignorance or recklessness in the humbler classes, who are generally ready to follow when they are wisely and patriotically led.

CHAPTER LXIX

NOMINATING CONVENTIONS

IN every American election there are two acts of choice, two periods of contest. The first is the selection of the candidate from within the party by the party; the other is the struggle between the parties for the place. Frequently the former of these is more important, more keenly fought over, than the latter, for there are many districts in which the predominance of one party is so marked that its candidate is sure of success, and therefore the choice of a candidate is virtually the choice of the officer or representative.

Preceding chapters have described the machinery which exists for choosing and nominating a candidate. The process is similar in every State of the Union, and through all elections to office, from the lowest to the highest, from that of common councilman for a city ward up to that of President of the United States. But, of course, the higher the office, and the larger the area over which the election extends, the greater are the efforts made to secure the nomination, and the hotter the passions it excites. The choice of a candidate for the presidency is so striking and peculiar a feature of the American system that it deserves a full examination.

Like most political institutions, the system of nominating the President by a popular convention is the result of a long process of evolution.

In the first two elections, those of 1789¹ and 1792, there was no need for nominations of candidates, because the whole nation wished and expected George Washington to be elected. So too,

¹ The President is now always chosen on the Tuesday after the first Monday in the November of an even year, whose number is a multiple of four (*e.g.* 1880, 1884, 1888), and comes into office in the spring following; but the first election was held in the beginning of 1789, because the Constitution had been then only just adopted.