

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 1789<sup>1</sup> and 1792, there was no need for nominations of candidates, because the whole nation wished and expected George Washington to be elected. So too,

<sup>1</sup> 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.

when in 1796 Washington declared his retirement, the dominant feeling of one party was for John Adams, that of the other for Thomas Jefferson, and nobody thought of setting out formally what was so generally understood.

In 1800, however, the year of the fourth election, there was somewhat less unanimity. The prevailing sentiment of the Federalists went for re-electing Adams, and the small conclave of Federalist members of Congress which met to promote his interest was deemed scarcely necessary. The (Democratic) Republicans, however, while united in desiring to make Jefferson President, hesitated as to their candidate for the vice-presidency, and a meeting of Republican members of Congress was therefore called to recommend Aaron Burr for this office. It was a small meeting and a secret meeting, but it is memorable not only as the first congressional caucus, but as the first attempt to arrange in any way a party nomination.

In 1804 a more regular gathering for the same purpose was held. All the Republican members of Congress were summoned to meet; and they unanimously nominated Jefferson for President, and George Clinton of New York for Vice-President. So in 1808 nearly all the Republican majority in both Houses of Congress met and formally nominated Madison and Clinton. The same course was followed in 1812, and again in 1816. But the objections which were from the first made to this action of the party in Congress, as being an arrogant usurpation of the rights of the people, — for no one dreamed of leaving freedom to the presidential electors, — gained rather than lost strength on each successive occasion, so much so that in 1820 the few who met made no nomination,<sup>1</sup> and in 1824, out of the Democratic members of both Houses of Congress summoned to the "nominating caucus," as it was called, only sixty-six attended, many of the remainder having announced their disapproval of the practice.<sup>2</sup> The nominee of this caucus came in only third at the polls, and this failure gave the *coup de grâce* to a plan which the levelling tendencies of the time, and the disposition to refer everything to the arbitrament of the

<sup>1</sup> It was not absolutely necessary to have a nomination, because there was a general feeling in favour of re-electing Monroe.

<sup>2</sup> The whole number was then 261, nearly all Democratic Republicans, for the Federalist party had been for some time virtually extinct.

masses, would in any case have soon extinguished. No congressional caucus was ever again held for the choice of candidates.

A new method, however, was not at once discovered. In 1828 Jackson was recommended as candidate by the legislature of Tennessee and by a number of popular gatherings in different places, while his opponents accepted, without any formal nomination, the then President, J. Q. Adams, as their candidate. In 1831, however, assemblies were held by two great parties (the Anti-Masons and the National Republicans, afterwards called Whigs) consisting of delegates from most of the States; and each of these conventions nominated its candidates for the presidency and vice-presidency. A third "national convention" of young men, which met in 1832, adopted the Whig nominations, and added to them a series of ten resolutions, constituting the first political platform ever put forth by a nominating body. The friends of Jackson followed suit by holding their national convention which nominated him and Van Buren. For the election of 1836, a similar convention was held by the Jacksonian Democrats, none by their opponents. But for that of 1840, national conventions of delegates from nearly all the States were held by both Democrats and Whigs, as well as by the (then young and very small) party of the Abolitionists. This precedent has been followed in every subsequent contest, so that the national nominating conventions of the great parties are now as much a part of the regular machinery of politics as are the rules which the Constitution itself prescribes for the election. The establishment of the system coincides with and represents the complete social democratization of politics in Jackson's time. It suits both the professionals, for whom it finds occupation, and whose power it secures, and the ordinary citizen who, not having leisure to attend to politics, likes to think that his right of selecting candidates is recognized by committing the selection to delegates whom he is entitled to vote for. But the system was soon seen to be liable to fall under the control of selfish intriguers and therefore prejudicial to the chances of able and independent men. As early as 1844 Calhoun refused to allow his name to be submitted to a nominating convention, observing that he would never have joined in breaking down the old congressional caucus had

he foreseen that its successor would prove so much more pernicious.

Thus from 1789 till 1800 there were no formal nominations; from 1800 till 1824, nominations were made by congressional caucuses; from 1824 till 1840, nominations irregularly made by State legislatures and popular meetings were gradually ripening towards the method of a special gathering of delegates from the whole country. This last plan has held its ground from 1840 till the present day, and is so exactly conformable to the political habits of the people that it is not likely soon to disappear.

Its perfection, however, was not reached at once. The early conventions were to a large extent mass meetings.<sup>1</sup> The later and present ones are regularly-constituted representative bodies, composed exclusively of delegates, each of whom has been duly elected at a party meeting in his own State, and brings with him his credentials. It would be tedious to trace in further detail the process whereby the present system was created, so I shall be content with sketching its outline as it now stands.

The Constitution provides that each State shall choose as many presidential electors as it has persons representing it in Congress, *i.e.* two electors to correspond to the two senators from each State, and as many more as the State sends members to the House of Representatives. Thus Delaware and Idaho have each three electoral votes, because they have each only one representative besides their two senators. New York has thirty-six electoral votes: two corresponding to its two senators, thirty-four corresponding to its thirty-four representatives in the House.

Now in the nominating convention each State is allowed twice as many delegates as it has electoral votes, *e.g.* Delaware and Idaho have each six delegates, New York has seventy-two. The delegates are chosen by local conventions in their several States, *viz.* two for each congressional district by the party convention of that district, and four for the whole State (called delegates-at-large) by the State convention. As each conven-

<sup>1</sup> In 1856 the first Republican convention, which nominated Fremont, was rather a mass meeting than a representative body, for in many States there was not a regular organization of the new party. So was the seceding Republican convention which met at Cincinnati in 1872 and nominated Greeley.

tion is composed of delegates from primaries, it is the composition of the primaries which determines that of the local conventions, and the composition of the local conventions which determines that of the national. To every delegate there is added a person called his "alternate," chosen by the local convention at the same time, and empowered to replace him in case he cannot be present in the national convention. If the delegate is present to vote, the alternate is silent; if from any cause the delegate is absent, the alternate steps into his shoes.

Respecting the freedom of the delegate to vote for whom he will, there have been differences both of doctrine and of practice. A local convention or State convention may instruct its delegates which aspirant<sup>1</sup> shall be their first choice, or even in case he cannot be carried, for whom their subsequent votes shall be cast. Such instructions are frequently given, and still more frequently implied, because a delegate is often chosen expressly as being the supporter of one or other of the aspirants whose names are most prominent. But the delegate is not absolutely bound to follow his instructions. He may vote even on the first ballot for some other aspirant than the one desired by his own local or State convention. Much more, of course, may he, though not so instructed, change his vote when it is plain that that aspirant will not succeed. His vote is always a valid one, even when given in the teeth of his instructions; but how far he will be held censurable for breaking them depends on a variety of circumstances. His motives may be corrupt; perhaps something has been given him. They may be pardonable; a party chief may have put pressure on him, or he may desire to be on the safe side, and go with the majority. They may be laudable; he really seeks to do the best for the party, or has been convinced by facts lately brought to his knowledge that the man for whom he is instructed is unworthy. Where motives are doubtful, it may be charitable, but it is not safe, to assume that they are of the higher order. Each "State delegation" has its chairman, and is expected to keep together during the convention. It usually travels together to the place

<sup>1</sup> I use throughout the term "aspirant" to denote a competitor for the nomination, reserving the term "candidate" for the person nominated as the party's choice for the presidency.

of meeting; takes rooms in the same hotel; has a recognized headquarters there; sits in a particular place allotted to it in the convention hall; holds meetings of its members during the progress of the convention to decide on the course which it shall from time to time take. These meetings, if the State be a large and doubtful one, excite great interest, and the sharp-eared reporter prowls round them, eager to learn how the votes will go. Each State delegation votes by its chairman, who announces how his delegates vote; but if his report is challenged, the roll of delegates is called, and they vote individually. Whether the votes of a State delegation shall be given solid for the aspirant whom the majority of the delegation favours, or by the delegates individually according to their preferences, is a point which has excited bitter controversy. The present practice of the Republican party (so settled in 1876 and again in 1880) allows the delegates to vote individually, even when they have been instructed by a State convention to cast a solid vote. The Democratic party, on the other hand, sustains any such instruction given to the delegation, and records the vote of all the State delegates for the aspirant whom the majority among them approve.<sup>1</sup> This is the so-called Unit Rule. If, however, the State convention has not imposed the unit rule, the delegates vote individually.

For the sake of keeping up party life in the Territories and in the Federal District of Columbia, delegates from them (and now [1893] even from the Indian Territory and Alaska) are admitted to the national convention, although the Territories and District have no votes in a presidential election. Delegations of States which are known to be in the hands of the opposite party, and whose preference of one aspirant to another will not really tell upon the result of the presidential election, are admitted to vote equally with the delegations of the States sure to go for the party which holds the convention. This arrangement is justified on the ground that it sustains the interest and energy of the party in States where it is in a minority. But it permits the choice to be determined by districts whose action will in no wise affect the election itself, and the delegates from these districts are apt to belong to a lower

<sup>1</sup> An attempt was made at the Democratic convention in Chicago in July, 1884, to overset this rule, but the majority reaffirmed it.

class of politicians, and to be swayed by more sordid motives than those who come from States where the party holds a majority.<sup>1</sup>

So much for the composition of the national convention: we may now go on to describe its proceedings.

It is held in the summer immediately preceding a presidential election, usually in June or July, the election falling in November. A large city is always chosen, in order to obtain adequate hotel accommodation, and easy railroad access. Formerly, conventions were commonly held in Baltimore or Philadelphia, but since the centre of population has shifted to the Mississippi valley, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Minneapolis, and especially Chicago, have become the favourite spots.

Business begins by the "calling of the convention to order" by the chairman of the National Party committee. Then a temporary chairman is nominated, and, if opposed, voted on; the vote sometimes giving an indication of the respective strength of the factions present. Then the secretaries and the clerks are appointed, and the rules which are to govern the business are adopted. After this, the committees, including those on credentials and resolutions, are nominated, and the convention adjourns till their report can be presented.

The next sitting usually opens, after the customary prayer, with the appointment of the permanent chairman, who inaugurates the proceedings with a speech. Then the report of the committee on resolutions (if completed) is presented. It contains what is called the platform, a long series of resolutions embodying the principles and programme of the party, which has usually been so drawn as to conciliate every section, and avoid or treat with prudent ambiguity those questions on which opinion within the party is divided. Any delegate who objects to a resolution can move to strike it out or amend it; but it is generally "sustained" in the shape it has received from the practised hands of the committee.

Next follows the nomination of aspirants for the post of

<sup>1</sup> Although the large majority of the delegates in the conventions of the two great parties belong to the class of professional politicians, there is always a minority of respectable men who do not belong to that class, but have obtained the post owing to their interest in seeing a strong and honest candidate chosen. The great importance of the business draws persons of talent and experience from most parts of the country.

party candidate. The roll of States is called, and when a State is reached to which an aspirant intended to be nominated belongs, a prominent delegate from that State mounts the platform, and proposes him in a speech extolling his merits, and sometimes indirectly disparaging the other aspirants. Another delegate seconds the nomination, sometimes a third follows; and then the roll-call goes on till all the States have been despatched, and all the aspirants nominated.<sup>1</sup> The average number of nominations is seven or eight; it rarely exceeds twelve.<sup>2</sup>

Thus the final stage is reached, for which all else has been but preparation—that of balloting between the aspirants. The clerks call the roll of States from Alabama to Wisconsin, and as each is called the chairman of its delegation announces the votes, *e.g.* six for A, five for B, three for C, unless, of course, under the unit rule, the whole vote is cast for that one aspirant whom the majority of the delegation supports. When all have voted, the totals are made up and announced. If one competitor has an absolute majority of the whole number voting, according to the Republican rule, a majority of two-thirds of the number voting, according to the Democratic rule, he has been duly chosen, and nothing remains but formally to make his nomination unanimous. If, however, as has usually happened of late years, no one obtains the requisite majority, the roll is called again, in order that individual delegates and delegations (if the unit rule prevails) may have the opportunity of changing their votes; and the process is repeated until some one of the aspirants put forward has received the required number of votes. Sometimes many roll-calls take place. In 1852 the Democrats nominated Franklin Pierce on the forty-ninth ballot, and the Whigs General Scott on the fifty-third. In 1880, thirty-six ballots were taken before General Garfield was nominated. But, in 1835, Martin Van Buren; in 1844, Henry Clay; in 1868 and 1872, Ulysses S. Grant; in 1888, Mr. Cleveland, were unanimously nominated, the three former by acclamation, the latter on the first ballot. In 1884 Mr. Blaine was nominated by the Republicans on the fourth ballot,

<sup>1</sup> Nominations may, however, be made at any subsequent time.

<sup>2</sup> However, in the Republican convention of 1888, fourteen aspirants were nominated at the outset, six of whom were voted for on the last ballot. Votes were given at one or other of the ballotings for nineteen aspirants in all.

Mr. Cleveland by the Democrats on the second; in 1888, Mr. Harrison on the eighth. In 1892 both Mr. Harrison (then President) and Mr. Cleveland were nominated on the first ballot, each of them by an overwhelming majority. Thus it sometimes happens that the voting is over in an hour or two, while at other times it may last for days.

When a candidate for the presidency has been thus found, the convention proceeds to similarly determine its candidate for the vice-presidency. The inferiority of the office, and the exhaustion which has by this time overcome the delegates, make the second struggle a less exciting and protracted one. Frequently one of the defeated aspirants is consoled by this minor nomination, especially if he has retired at the nick of time in favour of the rival who has been chosen. The work of the convention is then complete, and votes of thanks to the chairman and other officials conclude the proceedings. The two nominees are now the party candidates, entitled to the support of the party organizations and of loyal party men over the length and breadth of the Union.

Entitled to that support, but not necessarily sure to receive it. Even in America, party discipline cannot compel an individual voter to cast his ballot for the party nominee. All that the convention can do is to recommend the candidate to the party; all that opinion can do is to brand as a Kicker or Bolter whoever breaks away; all that the local party organization can do is to strike the bolter off its lists. But how stands it, the reader will ask, with the delegates who have been present in the convention, have had their chance of carrying their man, and have been beaten? are they not held absolutely bound to support the candidate chosen?

This is a question which has excited much controversy. The constant impulse and effort of the successful majority have been to impose such an obligation on the defeated minority, and the chief motive which has prevented it from being invariably formally enforced by a rule or resolution of the convention has been the fear that it might precipitate hostilities, might induce men of independent character, or strongly opposed to some particular aspirant, to refuse to attend as delegates, or to secede early in the proceedings when they saw that a person whom they disapproved was likely to win.

At the Republican national convention at Chicago in June, 1880, an attempt was successfully made to impose the obligation by the following resolution, commonly called the "Iron-clad Pledge": —

"That every member of this convention is bound in honour to support its nominee, whoever that nominee may be, and that no man should hold his seat here who is not ready so to agree."

This was carried by 716 votes to 3. But at the Republican national convention at Chicago in June, 1884, when a similar resolution was presented, the opposition developed was strong enough to compel its withdrawal; and in point of fact, several conspicuous delegates at that convention strenuously opposed its nominee at the subsequent presidential election, themselves voting, and inducing others to vote, for the candidate of the Democratic party.

## CHAPTER LXX

### THE NOMINATING CONVENTION AT WORK

WE have examined the composition of a national convention and the normal order of business in it. The more difficult task remains of describing the actual character and features of such an assembly, the motives which sway it, the temper it displays, the passions it elicits, the wiles by which its members are lured or driven to their goal.

A national convention has two objects, the formal declaration of the principles, views, and practical proposals of the party, and the choice of its candidates for the executive headship of the nation.

Of these objects the former has in critical times, such as the two elections preceding the Civil War, been of great importance. In the Democratic convention at Charleston in 1860, a debate on resolutions led to a secession, and to the break-up of the Democratic party.<sup>1</sup> But of late years the adoption of platforms, drafted in a vague and pompous style by the committee, has been almost a matter of form. Some observations on these enunciations of doctrine will be found in another chapter.<sup>2</sup>

The second object is of absorbing interest and importance, because the presidency is the great prize of politics, the goal of every statesman's ambition. The President can by his veto stop legislation adverse to the wishes of the party he represents. The President is the supreme dispenser of patronage.

<sup>1</sup> The national conventions of those days were much smaller than now, nor were the assisting spectators so numerous.

<sup>2</sup> Chap. LXXXIII. The nearest English parallel to an American "platform" is to be found in the addresses to their respective constituencies issued at a general election by the Prime Minister, if a member of the House of Commons, and the leader of the Opposition in that House. Such addresses, however, do not formally bind the whole party, as an American platform does.