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.[1] 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.[2]

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.

[1] The national conventions of those days were much smaller than now, nor were the assisting spectators so numerous.

[2] 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.

One may therefore say that the task of a convention is to choose the party candidate. And it is a task difficult enough to tax all the resources of the host of delegates and their leaders. Who is the man fittest to be adopted as candidate? Not even a novice in politics will suppose that it is the best man, *i.e.* the wisest, strongest, and most upright. Plainly, it is the man most likely to win, the man who, to use the technical term, is most "available." What a party wants is not a good President but a good candidate. The party managers have therefore to look out for the person likely to gain most support, and at the same time excite least opposition. Their search is rendered more troublesome by the fact that many of them, being themselves either aspirants or the close allies of aspirants, are not disinterested, and are distrusted by their fellow-searchers.

Many things have to be considered. The ability of a statesman, the length of time he has been before the people, his oratorical gifts, his "magnetism," his family connections, his face and figure, the purity of his private life, his "record" (the chronicle of his conduct) as regards integrity — all these are matters needing to be weighed. Account must be taken of the personal jealousies and hatreds which a man has excited. To have incurred the enmity of a leading statesman, of a powerful boss or ring, even of an influential newspaper, is serious. Several such feuds may be fatal.

Finally, much depends on the State whence a possible candidate comes. Local feeling leads a State to support one of its own citizens; it increases the vote of his own party in that State, and reduces the vote of the opposite party. Where the State is decidedly of one political colour, *e.g.* so steadily Republican as Vermont, so steadily Democratic as Maryland, this consideration is weak, for the choice of a Democratic candidate from the former, or of a Republican candidate from the latter, would not make the difference of the State's vote. It is therefore from a doubtful State that a candidate may with most advantage be selected; and the larger the doubtful State, the better. California, with her five electoral votes, is just worth "placating"; Indiana, with her fifteen votes, more so; New York, with her thirty-six votes, most so of all. Hence an aspirant who belongs to a great and doubtful State is *prima facie* the most eligible candidate.

Aspirants hoping to obtain the party nomination from a national convention may be divided into three classes, the two last of which, as will appear presently, are not mutually exclusive, viz. —

Favourites. Dark Horses. Favourite Sons.

A Favourite is always a politician well known over the Union, and drawing support from all or most of its sections. He is a man who has distinguished himself in Congress, or in the war, or in the politics of some State so large that its politics are matter of knowledge and interest to the whole nation. He is usually a person of conspicuous gifts, whether as a speaker, or a party manager, or an administrator. The drawback to him is that in making friends he has also made enemies.

A Dark Horse is a person not very widely known in the country at large, but known rather for good than for evil. He has probably sat in Congress, been useful on committees, and gained some credit among those who dealt with him in Washington. Or he has approved himself a safe and assiduous party man in the political campaigns of his own and neighbouring States, yet without reaching national prominence. Sometimes he is a really able man, but without the special talents that win popularity. Still, speaking generally, the note of the Dark Horse is respectability, verging on colourlessness; and he is therefore a good sort of person to fall back upon when able but dangerous Favourites have proved impossible. That native mediocrity rather than adverse fortune has prevented him from winning fame is proved by the fact that the Dark Horses who have reached the White House, if they have seldom turned out bad Presidents, have even more seldom turned out distinguished ones.

A Favourite Son is a politician respected or admired in his own State, but little regarded beyond it. He may not be, like the Dark Horse, little known to the nation at large, but he has not fixed its eye or filled its ear. He is usually a man who has sat in the State legislature; filled with credit the post of State governor; perhaps gone as senator or representative to Washington, and there approved himself an active promoter of local interests. Probably he possesses the qualities which gain local popularity, — geniality, activity, sympathy with the dominant

sentiment and habits of his State; or while endowed with gifts excellent in their way, he has lacked the audacity and tenacity which push a man to the front through a jostling crowd. More rarely he is a demagogue who has raised himself by flattering the masses of his State on some local questions, or a skilful handler of party organizations who has made local bosses and spoilsmen believe that their interests are safe in his hands. Anyhow, his personality is such as to be more effective with neighbours than with the nation, as a lamp whose glow fills the side chapel of a cathedral sinks to a spark of light when carried into the nave.

A Favourite Son may be also a Dark Horse; that is to say, he may be well known in his own State, but so little known out of it as to be an unlikely candidate. But he need not be. The types are different, for as there are Favourite Sons whom the nation knows but does not care for, so there are Dark Horses whose reputation, such as it is, has not been made in State affairs, and who rely very little on State favour.

There are seldom more than two, never more than three Favourites in the running at the same convention. Favourite Sons are more numerous — it is not uncommon to have four or five, or even six, though perhaps not all these are actually started in the race. The number of Dark Horses is practically unlimited, because many talked of beforehand are not actually started, while others not considered before the convention begins are discovered as it goes on. This happened in the leading and most instructive case of James A. Garfield, who was not voted for at all on the first ballot in the Republican convention of 1880, and had, on no ballot up to the thirty-fourth, received more than two votes. On the thirty-sixth[1] he was nominated by 399. So, in 1852, Pierce was scarcely known to the people when he was sprung on the convention. So, in 1868, Horatio Seymour, who had been so little thought of as a candidate that he was chairman of the Democratic convention, was first voted for on the twenty-second ballot. He refused to be nominated, but was induced to leave the chair and nominated on that very ballot.

To carry the analysis farther, it may be observed that four

[1] In 1860 the Democratic convention at Charleston nominated Mr. Douglas on the fifty-seventh ballot.

sets of motives are at work upon those who direct or vote in a convention, acting with different degrees of force on different persons. There is the wish to carry a particular aspirant. There is the wish to defeat a particular aspirant, a wish sometimes stronger than any predilection. There is the desire to get something for one's self out of the struggle — *e.g.* by trading one's vote or influence for the prospect of a Federal office. There is the wish to find the man who, be he good or bad, friend or foe, will give the party its best chance of victory. These motives cross one another, get mixed, vary in relative strength from hour to hour as the convention goes on and new possibilities are disclosed. To forecast their joint effect on the minds of particular persons and sections of a party needs wide knowledge and eminent acuteness. To play upon them is a matter of the finest skill.

The proceedings of a nominating convention can be best understood by regarding the three periods into which they fall: the transactions which precede the opening of its sittings; the preliminary business of passing rules and resolutions and delivering the nominating speeches; and, finally, the balloting.

A President has scarcely been elected before the newspapers begin to discuss his probable successor. Little, however, is done towards the ascertainment of candidates till about a year before the next election, when the factions of the chief aspirants prepare to fall into line, newspapers take up their parable in favour of one or other, and bosses begin the work of "subsoiling," *i.e.* manipulating primaries and local conventions so as to secure the choice of such delegates to the next national convention as they desire. In most of the conventions which appoint delegates, the claims of the several aspirants are canvassed, and the delegates chosen are usually chosen in the interest of one particular aspirant. The newspapers, with their quick sense of what is beginning to stir men's thoughts, redouble their advocacy, and the "boom" of one or two of the probable favourites is thus fairly started. Before the delegates leave their homes for the national convention, most of them have fixed on their candidate, many having indeed received positive instructions as to how their vote shall be cast. All appears to be spontaneous, but in reality both the choice of particular men as delegates, and the instructions given, are usually the result

of untiring underground work among local politicians, directed, or even personally conducted, by two or three skilful agents and emissaries of a leading aspirant, or of the knot which seeks to run him.

Four or five days before the day fixed for the opening of the convention the delegations begin to flock into the city where it is to be held. Some come attended by a host of friends and camp-followers, and are received at the depôt (railway terminus) by the politicians of the city, with a band of music and an admiring crowd. Thus Tammany Hall, the famous Democratic club of New York City, came six hundred strong to Chicago in July, 1884, filling two special trains.[1] A great crowd met it at the station, and it marched, following its Boss, from the cars to its headquarters at the Palmer House in procession, each member wearing his badge, just as the retainers of Earl Warwick the King-maker used to follow him through the streets of London with the Bear and Ragged Staff upon their sleeves. Less than twenty of the six hundred were delegates; the rest ordinary members of the organization, who had accompanied to give it moral and vocal support.[2]

Before the great day dawns many thousands of politicians, newspaper men, and sight-seers have filled to overflowing every hotel in the city, and crowded the main thoroughfares so that the horse-cars can scarcely penetrate the throng. It is like a mediæval pilgrimage, or the mustering of a great army. When the chief delegations have arrived, the work begins in earnest. Not only each large delegation, but the faction of each leading aspirant to the candidacy, has its headquarters, where the managers hold perpetual session, reckoning up their numbers, starting rumours meant to exaggerate their resources, and dishearten their opponents, organizing raids upon the less experienced delegates as they arrive. Some fill the entrance halls and bars of the hotels, talk to the busy reporters, extemporize meetings with tumultuous cheering for their favourite. The common "worker" is good enough to raise the boom by these devices. Meanwhile, the more skilful leaders begin (as it is

[1] The Boss of Tammany was an object of special curiosity to the crowd, being the most illustrious professional in the whole United States.

[2] The two other Democratic organizations which then existed in New York City, the County Democracy and Irving Hall, came each in force — the one a regiment of five hundred, the other of two hundred.

expressed) to "plough around" among the delegations of the newer Western and Southern States, usually (at least among the Republicans) more malleable, because they come from regions where the strength of the factions supporting the various aspirants is less accurately known, and are themselves more easily "captured" by bold assertions or seductive promises. Sometimes an expert intriguer will "break into" one of these wavering delegations, and make havoc like a fox in a hen-roost. "Missionaries" are sent out to bring over individuals; embassies are accredited from one delegation to another to endeavour to arrange combinations by coaxing the weaker party to drop its own aspirant, and add its votes to those of the stronger party. All is conducted with perfect order and good-humour, for the least approach to violence would recoil upon its authors; and the only breach of courtesy is where a delegation refuses to receive the ambassadors of an organization whose evil fame has made it odious.

It is against etiquette for the aspirants themselves to appear upon the scene,[1] whether from some lingering respect for the notion that a man must not ask the people to choose him, but accept the proffered honour, or on the principle that the attorney who conducts his own case has a fool for a client. But from Washington, if he is an official or a senator, or perhaps from his own home in some distant State, each aspirant keeps up hourly communication with his managers in the convention city, having probably a private wire laid on for the purpose. Not only may officials, including the President himself, become aspirants, but Federal office-holders may be, and very largely are, delegates, especially among the Southern Republicans when that party is in power.[2] They have the strongest personal interest in the issue; and the heads of departments can, by promises of places, exert a potent influence. One hears in America, just as one used to hear in France under Louis Napoleon or Marshal McMahon, of the "candidate of the Administration."

[1] Oddly enough, the only English parallel to this delicate reserve is to be found in the custom which forbids a candidate for the representation in Parliament of the University of Oxford to approach the University before or during the election.

[2] Not to add that many Southern Republican delegates are supposed to be purchasable.

As the hour when the convention is to open approaches, each faction strains its energy to the utmost. The larger delegations hold meetings to determine their course in the event of the man they chiefly favour proving "unavailable." Conferences take place between different delegations. Lists are published in the newspapers of the strength of each aspirant. Sea and land are compassed to gain one influential delegate, who "owns" other delegates. If he resists other persuasions, he is "switched on" to the private wire of some magnate at Washington, who "talks to him," and suggests inducements more effective than those he has hitherto withstood. The air is thick with tales of plots and treasons, so that no politician trusts his neighbour, for rumour spares none.

At length the period of expectation and preparation is over, and the summer sun rises upon the fateful day to which every politician in the party has looked forward for three years. Long before the time (usually 11 A.M.) fixed for the beginning of business, every part of the hall, erected specially for the gathering — a hall often large enough to hold from ten to fifteen thousand persons — is crowded.[1] The delegates — who in 1892 were 904 in the Republican convention and 909 in the Democratic — are a mere drop in the ocean of faces. Eminent politicians from every State of the Union, senators and representatives from Washington not a few, journalists and reporters, ladies, sight-seers from distant cities, as well as a swarm of partisans from the city itself, press in; some semblance of order being kept by the sergeant-at-arms and his marshals. Some wear devices, sometimes the badge of their State, or of their organization; sometimes the colours or emblem of their favourite aspirant. Each State delegation has its allotted place marked by the flag of the State floating from a pole; but leaders may be seen passing from one group to another, while the spectators listen to the band playing popular airs, and cheer any well-known figure that enters.

When the assembly is "called to order," a prayer is offered — each day's sitting begins with a prayer by some clergyman of local eminence, the susceptibilities of various denominations being duly respected in the selection — and business proceeds

[1] Admission is of course by ticket, and the prices given for tickets to those who, having obtained them, sell them, run high, up to $30, or even $50.

according to the order described in last chapter. First come the preliminaries, appointment of committees and chairmen, then the platform, and probably on the second day, but perhaps later, the nominations and balloting, the latter sometimes extending over several days. There is usually both a forenoon and an afternoon session.

A European is astonished to see nine hundred men prepare to transact the two most difficult pieces of business an assembly can undertake, the solemn consideration of their principles, and the selection of the person they wish to place at the head of the nation, in the sight and hearing of twelve thousand other men and women. Observation of what follows does not lessen the astonishment. The convention presents in sharp contrast and frequent alternation, the two most striking features of Americans in public — their orderliness and their excitability. Everything is done according to strict rule, with a scrupulous observance of small formalities which European meetings would ignore or despise. Points of order almost too fine for a parliament are taken, argued, decided on by the chair, to whom every one bows. Yet the passions that sway the multitude are constantly bursting forth in storms of cheering or hissing at an allusion to a favourite aspirant or an obnoxious name, and five or six speakers often take the floor together, shouting and gesticulating at each other till the chairman obtains a hearing for one of them. Of course it depends on the chairman whether or no the convention sinks into a mob. A chairman with a weak voice, or a want of prompt decision, or a suspicion of partisanship, may bring the assembly to the verge of disaster, and it has more than once happened that when the confusion that prevailed would have led to an irregular vote which might have been subsequently disputed, the action of the manager acting for the winning horse has, by waiving some point of order or consenting to an adjournment, saved the party from disruption. Even in the noisiest scenes the singular good sense and underlying love of fair play — fair play according to the rules of the game, which do not exclude some dodges repugnant to an honourable man — will often reassert itself, and pull back the vehicle from the edge of the precipice.

The chief interest of the earlier proceedings lies in the indications which speeches and votings give of the relative

strength of the factions. Sometimes a division on the choice of a chairman, or on the adoption of a rule, reveals the tendencies of the majority, or of influential leaders, in a way which sends the chances of an aspirant swiftly up or down the barometer of opinion. So when the nominating speeches come, it is not so much their eloquence that helps a nominee as the warmth with which the audience receives them, the volume of cheering and the length of time, sometimes fifteen minutes, during which the transport lasts. As might be guessed from the size of the audience which he addresses, an orator is expected to "soar into the blue empyrean" at once. The rhetoric is usually pompous and impassioned. To read a speech, even a short speech, from copious notes, is neither irregular nor rare.

While forenoon and evening, perhaps even late evening, are occupied with the sittings of the convention, canvassing and intrigue go on more briskly than ever during the rest of the day and night. Conferences are held between delegations anxious to arrange for a union of forces on one candidate.[1] Divided delegations hold meetings of their own members, meetings often long and stormy, behind closed doors, outside which a curious crowd listens to the angry voices within, and snatches at the reports which the dispersing members give of the result. Sometimes the whole issue of the convention hinges on the action of the delegates of a great State, which, like New York, under the unit rule, can throw seventy-two votes into the trembling scale. It has even happened, although this is against a well-settled custom, that a brazen aspirant himself goes the round of several delegations and tries to harangue them into supporting him.

As it rarely happens that any aspirant is able to command at

[1] In the Democratic convention of 1884 it was well known that the choice of Mr. Cleveland, the leading Favourite, would depend on the action of the delegation of New York State, not only, however, because it cast the largest vote, but because it was his own State, and because it was already foreseen that the presidential election would turn on the electoral vote of New York. Thus the struggle in the convention came to be really a duel between Mr. Cleveland and the Boss of Tammany, with whom Mr. Cleveland had at an earlier period in his career "locked horns." In 1892, however, Mr. Cleveland was strong enough to win on the first ballot against the vote of the New York delegation which was given to the Boss of the State who had lately been its governor and was in league with the then Boss of Tammany.

starting a majority of the whole convention, the object of each is to arrange a combination whereby he may gather from the supporters of other aspirants votes sufficient to make up the requisite majority, be it two-thirds, according to the Democratic rule, or a little more than a half, according to the Republican. Let us take the total number of votes at 820 — the figure in 1888. There are usually two aspirants commanding each from 230 to 330; one or two others with from 50 to 100, and the rest with much smaller figures, 10 to 30 each. A combination can succeed in one of two ways: (*a*) One of the stronger aspirants may pick up votes, sometimes quickly, sometimes by slow degrees, from the weaker candidates, sufficient to overpower the rival Favourite; (*b*) Each of the strongest aspirants may hold his forces so well together that after repeated ballotings it becomes clear that neither can win against the resistance of the other. Neither faction will, however, give way, because there is usually bitterness between them, because each would feel humiliated, and because each aspirant has so many friends that his patronage will no more than suffice for the clients to whom he is pledged already. Hence one or other of the baffled Favourites suddenly transfers the votes he commands to some one of the weaker men, who then so rapidly "develops strength" that the rest of the minor factions go over to him, and he obtains the requisite majority.[1] Experience has so well prepared the tacticians for one or other of these issues that the game is always played with a view to them. The first effort of the managers of a Favourite is to capture the minor groups of delegates who support one or other of the Favourite Sons and Dark Horses. Not till this proves hopeless do they decide to sell themselves as dear as they can by taking up and carrying to victory a Dark Horse or perhaps even a Favourite Son, thereby retaining the pleasure of defeating the rival Favourite, while at the same time establishing a claim for themselves and their faction on the aspirant whom they carry.[2]

[1] Suppose A and B, Favourites, to have each 300 votes. After some ballotings, A's friends, perceiving they cannot draw enough of the votes commanded by C, D, and F (who have each 60), and of G and H (who have each 20) to win, give their 300 votes to F. This gives him so considerable a lead that C, D, and G go over to him on the next ballot; he has then 440, and either wins at once (Republican rule) or will win next ballot (Democratic rule).

[2] It will be understood that while the Favourites and Favourite Sons are

It may be asked why a Dark Horse often prevails against the Favourites, seeing that either of the latter has a much larger number of delegates in his favour. Ought not the wish of a very large group to have so much weight with the minor groups as to induce them to come over and carry the man whom a powerful section of the party obviously desires? The reason why this does not happen is that a Favourite is often as much hated by one strong section as he is liked by another, and if the hostile section is not strong enough to keep him out by its unaided vote, it is sure to be able to do so by transferring itself to some other aspirant. Moreover, a Favourite has often less chance with the minor groups than a Dark Horse may have. He has not the charm of novelty. His "ins and outs" are known; the delegations weighed his merits before they left their own State, and if they, or the State convention that instructed them, decided against him then, they are slow to adopt him now. They have formed a habit of "antagonizing" him, whereas they have no hostility to some new and hitherto inconspicuous aspirant.

Let us now suppose resolutions and nominating speeches despatched, and the curtain raised for the third act of the convention. The chairman raps loudly with his gavel,[1] announcing the call of States for the vote. A hush falls on the multitude, a long deep breath is drawn, tally books are opened and pencils grasped, while the clerk reads slowly the names of State after State. As each is called, the chairman of its delegation rises and announces the votes it gives, bursts of cheering from each faction in the audience welcoming the votes given to the object of its wishes. Inasmuch as the disposition of most of the delegates has become known beforehand, not only to the managers, but to the public through the press, the loudest welcome is given to a delegate or delegation whose vote turns out better than had been predicted.

In the first scene of this third and decisive act the Favourites

before the convention from the first, some of the Dark Horses may not appear as aspirants till well on in the balloting. They may be persons who have never been thought of before as possible candidates. There is therefore always a great element of exciting uncertainty.

[1] The gavel is a sort of auctioneer's hammer used by a chairman to call the attention of the meeting to what he is saying or to restore order. That used at a national convention is often made of pieces of wood from every State.

have, of course, the leading parts. Their object is to produce an impression of overwhelming strength, so the whole of this strength is displayed, unless, as occasionally happens, an astute manager holds back a few votes. This is also the bright hour of the Favourite Sons. Each receives the vote of his State, but each usually finds that he has little to expect from external help, and his friends begin to consider into what other camp they had better march over. The Dark Horses are in the background, nor is it yet possible to say which (if any) of them will come to the front.

The first ballot seldom decides much, yet it gives a new aspect to the battle-field, for the dispositions of some groups of voters who had remained doubtful is now revealed, and the managers of each aspirant are better able to tell, from the way in which certain delegations are divided, in what quarters they are most likely to gain or lose votes on the subsequent ballots. They whisper hastily together, and try, in the few moments they have before the second ballot is upon them, to prepare some new line of defence or attack.

The second ballot, taken in the same way, sometimes reveals even more than the first. The smaller and more timid delegations, smitten with the sense of their weakness, despairing of their own aspirant, and anxious to be on the winning side, begin to give way; or if this does not happen on the second ballot, it may do so on the third. Rifts open in their ranks, individuals or groups of delegates go over to one of the stronger candidates, some having all along meant to do so, and thrown their first vote merely to obey instructions received or fulfil the letter of a promise given. The gain of even twenty or thirty votes for one of the leading candidates over his strength on the preceding ballot so much inspirits his friends, and is so likely to bring fresh recruits to his standard, that a wily manager will often, on the first ballot, throw away some of his votes on a harmless antagonist that he may by rallying them increase the total of his candidate on the second, and so convey the impression of growing strength.

The breathing space between each ballot and that which follows is used by the managers for hurried consultations. Aides-de-camp are sent to confirm a wavering delegation, or to urge one which has been supporting a now hopeless aspirant