

SOME NEW BOOKS.

Our Nominating Machinery.

One of the most valuable contributions to the collection of "Harvard Historical Studies" is the volume entitled "Nominations for Elective Office in the United States by Frederick W. Dallinger (Longmans). With the exception of "The American Caucus System," published by the Putnam some fourteen years ago, no systematic attempt has been made to consider in all its bearings the very important part played by the provisions for nominations in our governmental machinery. It was for the purpose of supplying this deficiency that the book before us was prepared. The author's aim has been to give an account of the origin and development of our nominating system, to describe it as it is today, and to point out such evils as have arisen under it. Such remedies as have been suggested for its removal. It is chiefly to the historical chapters, comprising some ninety pages of the volume, that we would direct attention at this time. It is but just to recognize that the author has approached the question from a strictly nonpartisan point of view, and has treated it in a scientific way. The compilation of the materials hereof we have here the digested outcome has, evidently, required a great deal of research.

Mr. Dallinger begins by pointing out that, from very remote times, wherever popular government has existed, the necessity of some method of selecting candidates previously to the formal election has been perceived. Indeed, our word "candidate" is derived from a custom which prevailed in Republican Rome, the custom, namely, for aspirants to elective office to appear clothed in the white toga in the forum, to plead their own merits before the assembled voters. In later times, when the foundations of popular government were being laid on the ruins of the feudal system, a method of self-announced candidacy similar to the Roman practice is encountered. This usage was supplemented by a system of nomination by small circles of rich landowners, who, on account of the limitations of the suffrage, were able to control the parliamentary element. There existed, also, the legal nomination at the hustings on "Nomination Day," as it was called, which was open to voters of all parties, and was, in fact, a sort of preliminary test. In case no more persons were nominated than there were members to be elected, there was said to be an "uncontested election." In England, since 1572, the plan of nomination by a paper signed by ten voters has taken the place of the old nomination day. The recent introduction of a modified caucus system by the Liberal party is a significant change in English political methods. In 1850, Liberal candidates in boroughs, and some in counties, were chosen in local party associations, and appealed to the Liberal electors on the ground of having been thus selected. Five years later, nearly all new candidates were so chosen, and a man often became a candidate against a nominee of the association was denounced as an interloper and traitor. The same process has been going on in the Tory party, though more slowly. It would be interesting to compare the methods of nomination in the various countries of France, Germany, and Italy, but we must confine ourselves to the history of the American system.

The author has been able to secure only fragmentary information regarding the mode of nominating candidates in the various offices of the British colonies of North America. The fact is that in all except the charter colonies, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut, the number of elective offices was very small, being confined to the Governor, the Council, the State Legislature, and a few local functionaries. From the meagre sources of knowledge at Mr. Dallinger's disposal, he finds that, in the South, candidates were, as a rule, self-announced, after the traditional English custom, and this method of nomination continued to prevail in the mother country, by an agreement among the leading planters, continued to be the prevailing mode of nomination for district officers in the Southern and Southwestern States, down to the Civil War. Even at the present time, it is no uncommon occurrence to find a candidate for the office of Sheriff, or to announce themselves as candidates for a particular elective office; but in such cases the actual choice of a candidate is almost always left to the party voters in their primaries and conventions. In the general case, the mode of nomination to be found in the various States is democratic communities, and its incompatibility with the unified action which is essential to party government. In New England and the Middle Colonies, also, nominations were, in some cases, made at private conferences, or what would now be called "parlor caucuses" of those especially interested in public affairs. There seems to have been occasionally an agreement extending through the different towns corresponding to the nomination of a candidate. The mode of nomination of the Connecticut officers. By the "fundamental order" of 1639-40, a "court election" was held annually for the choice of a governor and six magistrates, at which no person could be voted for unless he had been previously nominated. The members from each town were empowered to "add so many more nominees as they judged requisite." From the list of candidates thus nominated, the Governor and magistrates were then elected by the freemen of the colony. The system ultimately established in Connecticut, and tenaciously adhered to by the several towns voted for twenty persons to be nominated for Assistants, that is members of the Council or Upper House of the Legislature. The result of the vote of each town was then sent to Hartford, where the names of the colony was counted in the presence of both houses of the Legislature. A list of the names of twenty persons receiving the highest number of votes was sent to each town; from this list of officially nominated candidates each freeman voted for twelve at the regular election. This system, which existed also for a while in Massachusetts survived in Connecticut down to the adoption of the present State Constitution in 1818, from 1780 to the last named year, the Connecticut members of the Federal House of Representatives were chosen by the same method.

The derivation of the word "caucus" is first appeared about 1724, in Massachusetts, is doubtful. However derived, the word was applied in Massachusetts to the clubs formed by the friends of colonial self-government, which clubs not only served alive the sentiment which ultimately resulted in American independence, but they were the localities nominated the Whig candidates for the various elective offices. Gordon, in his history of the Revolution, thus describes the procedure of the early caucuses: "More than fifty years ago, Mr. Samuel Adams and his associates, and others including one or two from the north, met in a town, where all the ship business is carried on, to meet, make a caucus and lay plans for introducing certain persons into places of trust and power. When they had settled it, they separated and used each his particular influence within his own circle. He and his friends would furnish themselves with balloons bearing the names of the parties fixed upon, which they distributed on the day of election. By acting in concert, they generally carried the elections to their own mind." It was in this way that the caucus first became a representative in the General Court for Boston. To the North End caucus is due a famous historical event, the Boston Tea Party. At a meeting of this body it was voted "that the tea shipped by the East India Company shall not be landed." In addition to the North End caucus, there were other organizations of a similar kind, the most important were the Merchant's Club, the South End Caucus and the Middle District Caucus. All these associations were secret societies or clubs, rather than public meetings of the voters, but they performed exactly the same functions as do our caucuses and primaries to-day.

Outside of New England during the Revolutionary period, nominations for the various elective offices, particularly the office of delegate to the Continental Congress, seem to have been made by branches of the "Sons of Liberty," by the Committee of Correspondence, or by a conference committee composed of delegates from these and kindred organizations. Thus in New York, in July, 1774, the Continental Congress, as yet unorganized, met at a general meeting of the citizens of that point, a sub-committee to confer with a similar committee from the Mechanic's Club with regard to arrangements for taking a vote in the different wards as a result of this conference, July 28 was appointed for the election. By beginning the Revolution the caucus or primary had become pretty well established throughout New England and the Middle States. By the close of the war, it had gradually lost its secret character, and became a miniature meeting of the party voters of the ward district. In New England, except in some of the large cities and in those sections of other States which have been settled by New England people, the caucus still retains its original town meeting aspect; but elsewhere, with the growth of population, the caucus system has become more and more a mere polling place for the election of delegates to the various conventions, and of members of the local party committee, no opportunity being afforded for any discussion of the merits of the various candidates. The result has been that the real nomination of candidates has been made by the hands either of "parlor caucuses" or of political committees and clubs, the power of the individual voter being restricted to a choice between candidates agreed upon at such preliminary secret convention. The "primary" method of nomination, formerly used by the organization of the Federalists, the adoption of the Federal Constitution framed at Philadelphia in 1787 introduced for the first time the election of national officers. In 1788 and again in 1792, Washington was the sole candidate for the Presidency, being nominated, so to speak, by acclamation. In 1796, candidates were nominated by State Legislatures, State legislative caucuses, public meetings and irregular conventions of the people. In 1800, with improved means of transportation, the confused and irregular system of nomination was superseded, with the exception of a few offices gave way to the national convention, which is in vogue to-day.

The nominating convention was first evolved in Pennsylvania. In the autumn of 1790, a public meeting of the Federalists was held at Lancaster, and a call was issued on Feb. 6, signed by 11 members of Congress. In accordance with this call, a caucus was held on the evening of Feb. 14, in the House of Representatives. Out of 176 Republican members, however, only 216 were present, and the caucus was a failure. On May 7, 1832, by which the nominees of the regular convention of the party were endorsed. This assembly is chiefly noteworthy for its adoption of a series of resolutions in place of "an address to the people," thus making the party platform the basis of all its action. The resolutions were, in effect, a declaration of war against the Federalists, and a call for a national convention to be held at the Democracy for the purpose of uniting on a candidate for the Vice-Presidency. There was no opposition within the party to Jackson for President, and the convention was held on May 21, 1832. Its proceedings were similar to those of the Whig Convention. Four years later, however, there was considerable resistance to the holding of a convention, especially among some of the Southern Democrats. The reason for the resistance was the fact that the Whig Convention was determined that Van Buren should be his successor, and recommended a convention with that end in view; whereas the Legislatures of Alabama and Tennessee nominated Judge White for the latter State as a Democratic candidate for the Presidency. The Whig Convention, however, held at Baltimore in May, 1835, at which Van Buren was nominated as the party standard bearer. The irregular character of this convention is exemplified in the case of the vote of Tennessee, which was cast for Van Buren by a Mr. Edward Russell, who happened to be in Baltimore at the time. The Whig party held no national convention in 1836, but in 1840, national conventions were held in each of the States, and the result was the nomination of Van Buren as the Democratic candidate for the Presidency and Vice-Presidency.

There is a mistaken notion current that the rule requiring two-thirds of the votes for a nomination was first adopted in 1844, and for the specific purpose of defeating Van Buren's candidacy. The truth is that, in the very first Democratic national convention convened at Baltimore on May 21, 1832, the following resolution was adopted: "Resolved, That the delegates to the next national convention be a candidate to a number of votes equal to the number to which it will be entitled in the electoral colleges in voting for President and Vice-President; and that two-thirds of the whole number of votes in the convention shall be necessary to constitute a majority." The rule, in reality, was not adopted by the Democratic National Convention of 1832 was to the effect that "The majority of the delegates from each State shall designate the person for whom the votes of the State shall be given." This was the rule adopted by the Whig party also. Either in the form of a rule adopted by the national convention, or in the form of instructions by the State conventions, the practice of having a majority of each State delegation cast the entire vote of the State was held County and Congressional Conventions in the different sections of Massachusetts, and, therefore, the convention of delegates appears to have been the prevailing medium of nominating for all district offices. These conventions were, at first, called by vote of the people in some one city or town, but gradually, with the growth of party organizations, the call came to be issued by the district or town committee. The committee seems, in some instances, to have exercised the function of nominating the party candidate. The practice of "splitting the vote" was originated early, in 1828, the complaint was made that the Middlesex County Conventions had not been properly advertised. The method of nominating the officers elected by the people of the State at large, as, for example, the Governor and Lieutenant Governor, was not immediately following the adoption of the Constitution, candidates for Governor were nominated at a meeting of the party voters from the different parts of the State held at the principal city. This was the case in 1790, and gradually, with the growth of party organizations, the call came to be issued by the district or town committee. The committee seems, in some instances, to have exercised the function of nominating the party candidate. The practice of "splitting the vote" was originated early, in 1828, the complaint was made that the Middlesex County Conventions had not been properly advertised.

After the revolutionary period, Massachusetts seems to have been somewhat behind Pennsylvania in respect to nominating machinery. By 1802, however, both the Federalist and Republican parties held County and Congressional Conventions in the different sections of Massachusetts, and, therefore, the convention of delegates appears to have been the prevailing medium of nominating for all district offices. These conventions were, at first, called by vote of the people in some one city or town, but gradually, with the growth of party organizations, the call came to be issued by the district or town committee. The committee seems, in some instances, to have exercised the function of nominating the party candidate. The practice of "splitting the vote" was originated early, in 1828, the complaint was made that the Middlesex County Conventions had not been properly advertised.

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From the beginning, the system of nomination by Congress caucus had much opposition to encounter. The assumption by Senator Bradley of the right of chairman of the caucus of 1804, to call a similar caucus, was not only a violation of the Constitution at the time, but it soon subsided. In 1812, the so-called "peace Republicans" in their address in favor of the candidacy of DeWitt Clinton, declared that "the nomination of a candidate for Governor by the Legislature is a violation of the Federal Constitution, dangerous to the rights of the people and to the freedom of election." As a matter of fact, DeWitt Clinton was nominated by the Legislature in 1804, and the members of the two Houses of a State Legislature, at the present day, held for the nomination of a candidate for United States Senator. It should be noted that, throughout this period, the party candidates for Presidential electors in the different States were nominated by the party voters of the State at large, and by 1800, the legislative caucus system had become the prevailing method of nominating State officers. The change was due to the fact that the difficulty of communication between different parts of the State. The legislative caucus was the easiest method, inasmuch as the members of the Legislature were already assembled, and the Opposition to the legislative caucus method of nominating State officers seems to have been contemporaneous with the opposition to the Congress caucus in National politics. The legislative caucus, however, possessed greater vitality, and it was not until 1824, the year in which the caucus caucus met its fate, that the former method of nominating State officers was practiced for the last time in New York. 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