THE REPUBLICAN NATIONAL CONVENTION OF 1884

By A. B. Funk

The Republican National Convention opening in Chicago June 3, 1884, has with much propriety been termed historic, because of its distinguished character and political consequences.

By the grace and favor of Republicans of the eleventh congressional district of Iowa, it was my privilege to be a delegate to this memorable party council. Its survivors are few in number and probably none are less than eighty-five years of age. Every man mentioned herein as having more than a voting part in proceedings has doubtless gone the way of earth, the temporary chairman, John R. Lynch, having passed away only a few months ago at the age of ninety-two years.

After the lapse of fifty-six eventful years I have vivid recollection of the more interesting incidents and influential factors. From the folds of faithful memory I will endeavor to supplement the printed record with original contribution that may be of interest to a later generation.

The outstanding candidate for nomination as President of the United States was James G. Blaine of Maine. He had been narrowly defeated in two previous conventions, each defeat to be followed by a higher tide of party popularity. He appeared in this convention with the enthusiastic support of a distinct majority of delegates hailing from states in which the choice of republican electors was possible.

The only other candidate before the convention with following at all formidable was Chester A. Arthur of New York, who had become President through the assassination of President Garfield. For him there was general respect on the basis of personal character and the even tenor of uneventful administrative record. He had never received in his own state the "baptism of a popular vote," his only office having been that of collector of the port of New York. Nomination as Vice President as a consolation prize to the now submerged Roscoe Conkling was not a popular passport to promotion. His delegates in this convention were largely from states

unable to choose a single republican elector.

There were other names to be submitted to the convention, men of high character and eminent in statesmanship, but they were having little consideration—the line-up being largely for and against Blaine.

A few preliminary pictures and observations may be worth while.

The Indiana delegation was seated immediately in front of the Iowa group. In the settling process at the first morning session a Hoosier quite audibly threw out the inquiry: "Where's Ben?" [Benjamin Harrison—Ed.] The reply was: "Oh Ben had a hunch that he might be in the running so he went home to hide his blushes." This bit of banter raised a big laugh among the gentlemen from Indiana. Four years later "Ben" was easily nominated and triumphantly elected President of the United States. Destiny sometimes plays peculiar pranks with a prophet without fitting honor among his own people.

Two other members of this convention subsequently reached the summit of political aspiration.

William McKinley was spokesman of the strong Ohio delegation. Not commanding in stature, he was yet so classic of countenance, so gracious of bearing, so magnetic in personality and so skillful in diplomacy as to be a striking figure on this great stage of national notables. With his delegation almost equally divided between Blaine and John Sherman on his own state, it was a real test of character and courage for him to be for the Maine man without apology as he played the part of an influential factor in the shaping of historic events. At the age of forty-one years, and early in a congressional career, an eminent future was easy to foresee.

Theodore Roosevelt appeared as delegate-at-large from the state of New York. Not yet twenty-six, he had to his credit in his great home state three successful legislative sessions, but he was not widely nationally known. Tagged as a mugwump, and assumed to be consciously exuding an odor of political sanctity, he was not in especially high standing in this hard-boiled political aggregation. Standing on a chair to second the nomination of Lynch as temporary chairman, he was not

an imposing figure—short, slender, boyish looking, thin mutton chops, conspicuously spectacled. He had a hard time with boisterous delegates, some of whom were saying "sit down Goosevelt;" "Goosevelt sit down." Holding his ground good-naturedly, his speech was to the point and not too long, which gave him better standing, but a newspaper reporter among the crowd with a camera to catch probable Presidents of the future would hardly have snapped Theodore Roosevelt.

Among those present was Thomas C. Platt, as a New York district delegate, just emerging from the obscurity he had acquired by his "me too' retirement from the senate with Roscoe Conkling. His return to political power far more commanding was not then foreseen.

Mark Hanna, a delegate-at-large from Ohio, was just entering upon his conspicuous national career, discreetly awaiting a later day of commanding political influence.

An outstanding personality in the convention was George F. Hoar of Massachusetts. He was much respected in his senatorial eminence, beloved by his associates and very easy to inspect as a handsome elderly man, benign of countenance and gracious in bearing. His serene composure in the midst of convention tumult was more appealing to admiration than the zeal of more actively contending factors. He went along with his delegation in the support of Edmunds but was not at all conspicuous as a stop Blaine factor.

Galusha A. Grow, of Pennsylvania, was apparently holding over in political activity from a past generation. He had made a remarkable record as speaker of the house of representatives in the stormy days at the opening of the civil war period. A stronger claim upon enduring fame, however, was his years of struggle in passing through congress the far-reaching homestead bill, to have it vetoed by President Buchanan, and his success in its second passage, and the signing thereof by Abraham Lincoln. In this convention the old warrior was in the thick of the fight for Blaine.

The convention opened with the usual formalities. In the invocation, thanks were feelingly expressed for the republican party: for "its splendid history and still more splendid possibilities."

Senator Sabin of Minnesota as national chairman, warmed the cockles in the hearts of the republican hosts of all factions by stirring party panegyric. In closing, in a manner quite perfunctory, he announced the committee choice for temporary chairman in the person of Powell Clayton, of Arkansas, and moved his election.

In the Massachusetts delegation promptly arose a young congressman, to become better known to his countrymen—by name Henry Cabot Lodge. At thirty-four, bewhiskered and brown, with shoulders slightly sloping he was not especially imposing in appearance, but to an extent he bore the stamp of intellect and interesting personality as he moved to substitute the name of John R. Lynch of Mississippi for that of Powell Clayton as temporary chairman.

This assault upon assumed committee prerogative threw the convention into an uproar. It served to bring to the surface existing antagonism as revealed in speeches of much feeling by the Blaine forces and the opposition. After much speaking and parliamentary scoring, occupying several hours of time, a roll call of states developed a majority of forty votes for the Lodge substitute—a victory for the stop Blaine forces.

John R. Lynch was a man of color, said to have been born a slave. He was now thirty-six years of age, had been in congress two or three terms making a commendable record. His creditable speech of acceptance sustained the rumor that he did not desire the responsibility nor the distinction conferred, and it was generally understood he was drafted as available to the ends of strategy. He was a man of character and his service as temporary chairman was duly dignified and generally acceptable.

On the morning of the second day the convention was moving along in admirable harmony when a delegate from Tennessee introduced a resolution that developed sensation extraordinary. It read as follows:

> Resolved, as a sense of this convention, that every member of it is bound in honor to support its nominee, whoever that nominee may be; and that no man should hold a seat here who is not ready so to agree.

Amid great confusion, delegate Pierce, of Massachusetts,

secured recognition to fire the first gun at the mischievous interloper. After expressing good faith as to the obvious intent of all, he said the resolution "had a bad paternity," having been brought here four years ago "by Mr. Conkling—the late Mr. Conkling."

It had just this origin and had passed in the convention of 1880 with only three dissenting votes. Conkling then proposed to purge the offending trio but finally withdrew this motion.

Hawkins, the mover, finally secured a chance to speak in support of his resolution. He had "heard whispers in the air" which he did not "believe to be true," and was simply trying to secure expression of all-around good faith.

But the real fireworks were in reserve until a man standing in the California delegation secured recognition in tones that fairly shook the rafters. In his early thirties, tall of stature, sturdy in physique, with strong features, flashing dark eyes and sure-footed in poise, he was a superb type of virile intellectual and physical manhood. This was George A. Knight of California, and his speech was in stirring eloquence and captivating delivery all that was foreshadowed by magnetic and majestic presence. Getting off to a good start he went on to say: "there are already whisperings in the air, of men high in the republican party, openly and avowedly declaring that they will not support one man if he be nominated by this convention." "That kind of men we want to know, and the sooner they are out of the republican party the better for the party." "No more enthusiastic people for their candidate are under the shadow of the American flag than those from which I come, but if he should not be the choice, I believe we will be false to every principle of the republican party if we do not abide by the nominee of this party of intelligence." In closing, Knight fired this hot one: "and let all those, be they editors of newspapers or conducting great periodical journals, who refuse to support the nominee, let them be branded, that they not only come here and violate the implied faith that was put in them, but the direct and honest convictions of this convention, expressed by direct votes upon the subject." This was a pointed reference to the mugwumps and especially to

the next speaker who rose to accept the challenge of debate.

Pandemonium is the only word that will adequately describe the sensation that ensued. Even those only in part, if at all, in agreement with his purpose joined in the storms of applause in admiration of the striking personality, the flashing eloquence and fearless daring of the speaker, impossible of anything like adequate description on paper.

It was difficult for the presiding officer to bring the convention back to the regular order. For a considerable period demands for recognition were unavailing, and when secured and the speaker identified, there was strenuous endeavor to submerge his voice with clamor.

Standing on a chair in the New York area, six feet plus, slender and erect, blond in type, dignified in bearing with well formed features, with neatly trimmed mutton chops, graying as was his hair which fell in parts precisely equal on either side of a shapely head, faultlessly attired and immaculately groomed, this was George William Curtis in his early sixties. He well knew, as did everybody else, who was meant in the withering indictment of the fiery Californian, and he was on his feet to reply. In a voice tremulous with feeling which he endeavored to control, he opened with this striking declaration:

"A republican and a free man I came into this convention. By the grace of God, a republican and a free man will I go out of this convention." Again there was sensation extraordinary. The great audience, understood to be largely against his interpretation of private obligation and public duty, gave the speaker spontaneous ovation in open recognition of his engaging presence, his blunt eloquence and his monumental audacity.

The incident exemplifies the power of a striking statement, dramatically expressed, on a great audience emotionally aroused. Bound by prejudice, Curtis was not "a free man." Repudiating the agreement of his party he did not, by the grace of God or otherwise, "go out of the convention a republican." The entire speech was eloquent as the speaker was elegant, but utterly unresponsive to the challenge he was assuming to meet. In the forensic combat he escaped with his

life, while leaving on the shining lance of his adversary his mantle of political righteousness.

These oratorical cloudbursts closed the debate. The convention was about to deal with the resolution in a call of states under the motion to table when its sponsor blandly asked leave to withdraw.

The committee on permanent organization reported as its choice for president of the convention General John B. Henderson of Missouri, which met with unanimous approval.

Much valuable time was wasted in an endeavor to issue to veterans of the civil war five hundred tickets of admission when there was not an unoccupied chair in the great auditorium and standing room was at a premium.

At the opening of the morning session of the third day Bishop Fallows, of Chicago, sought Divine guidance in the selection of candidates and the declaration of principles and asked that "final ratification by the people be made in unmistakable manner."

There was discussion long and heated over a proposition to cut down representation in the national convention in states hopelessly democratic. It becoming more and more apparent that the proposition was doomed it was reluctantly withdrawn.

The report of the committee on resolutions was submitted by its chairman, William McKinley of Ohio.

It was a McKinley platform in its assertion that the imposition of duties on foreign imports, so levied as to afford security to industry and protection to the rights and wages of active and intelligent labor, is essential to national prosperity. Pledges was given to correct the inequalities of the tariff, the establishment of a national bureau of labor was favored, entangling alliances with foreign nations frowned upon, and sound money supported.

In this instrument was sounded an economic note strange to modern philosophy and experience. It declared that "the democratic party has failed completely to relieve the people of the burden of unnecessary taxation by wise reduction of the surplus."

In those days the government and the politicians were em-

barrassed by an overflowing treasury, due to the collection of revenues much in excess of national needs for its support and that could be used in the reduction of the public debt by the payment of bonds as they matured. The national debt was then less than a billion and a half dollars.

At the evening session on the third day the order of business was announced as the presentation of candidates for President.

In the call of states there was no response until the state of Connecticut was reached, when Senator Brandegee took the platform to place in nomination General Joseph R. Hawley. He dramatically recited the story of his candidate. "Entering the civil war with a musket he came out a major general." "A republican before the party was born," a statesman of rare services, an orator of renown and "what the people all love—God Almighty's noblest work— an honest man." His nomination "would sweep the country from the storm-vexed coast of the Atlantic to the Golden Gate of the peaceful sea."

As an able statesman, a brilliant soldier and an honest man, General John A. Logan, of Illinois, was presented by Shelby M. Cullom, his senatorial colleague. A brilliant war record and a distinguished career as a statesman were emphasized, but by no means overdrawn. Among other reasons for this nomination was the expressed belief that "the hundreds of thousands of brave veterans standing around the telegraph offices of this land awaiting to hear the glad news who will give you a glorious victory in November."

When the state of Maine was reached there was commotion extraordinary and expectation to be fully realized. Approaching the platform from the Ohio area was one of the best beloved as well as one of the most eloquent men of his state, rich in oratory—Judge William H. West. Whether from weight of years or from physical impairment due to other causes, he was being supported along the way and up the steps to a seat on the platform from which he made his speech, part of the time with a leg over one arm of the chair. It soon became apparent that there was nothing whatever the matter with the speaker above his collar button. In a voice full and clear, reference was feelingly made to the part he had in the convention that nominated Abraham Lincoln. Eloquently outlining

party achievement and party responsibility and paying gracious tribute to leaders of the opposition he dramatically enquired, "Who shall be our candidate."

As the candidate of any particular class or faction the nominee would be buried so deep "the hand of the resurrection could not fathom his grave at the November election." What he must be to meet necessary popular approval was graphically outlined as to character, achievement and leadership. And, "Gentleman, such a representative republican, enthroned in the hearts and affections of the people, is James G. Blaine of Maine." Continuing: "It has been said that in making this nomination every other consideration should merge, every other interest be sacrificed, in order, and with a view exclusively, to secure the republican vote and carry the state of New York. Gentlemen, the republican party demands of this convention a nominee whose inspiration and glorious prestige shall carry the presidency with or without the state of New York." With Blaine "the camp fires and beacon lights will illuminate the continent from the Golden Gate to Cleopatra's Needle. With this candidate the shouts of September victory in Maine will be re-echoed back by the thunders of the Ohio victory in October. Nominate him, and the millions who are now in waiting will rally to swell the column of victory that is sweeping on. In the name of the majority of the delegates from the republican states, and their glorious constituencies who must fight this battle, I nominate James G. Blaine of Maine."

When tempestuous applause long continued had so far subsided as to restore some semblance of order, Senator Davis, of Minnesota, in opening a seconding speech, observed "In the face of the demonstration we have seen and heard it would seem scarcely necessary to second a nomination which appears already to be a foregone conclusion."

Call of the state of New York brought forward Martin I. Townsend, an old guard wheelhorse, to place in nomination President Chester A. Arthur. In the course of his speech he washed and hung out to dry in the presence of the convention considerable soiled political linen of the Empire state. In submitting claims of their candidates, other speakers employed

language persuasive and conciliatory. This sponsor dealt in demand and denunciation. His candidate was all right—the convention in its resolutions had admitted it—so why not? The people were demanding his nomination. Beware, or take the consequences. Quoting:

> Our constituents will look unto us. In the days of James II, he got into difficulties with the Bishops. He imprisoned all the leading Bishops in England. Among them was Trelawney, from Cornwall, Bishop of Bristol. The Cornishmen were very much excited because their friend was in jail; and a distich was sent out, the burden of which was this:
>
> "And shall Trelawney die? and shall Trelawney die?
>
> Then thirty thousand Cornishmen will know the reason why?"
>
> And in this case, striking down Mr. Arthur, and not 30,000 republicans, but thirty times 30,000, will know the reason why.

In a speech of breadth and depth, as well as length, Governor Foraker submitted the name of John Sherman, who in achievement, ability and character was well worth considering, but with nearly half the Ohio delegation shouting for Blaine, for whom the speaker had strong leaning, there was not much enthusiasm and still less hope for results from the Foraker eloquence.

Responding to the call of the state of Vermont, in a very able speech Governor John D. Long of Massachusetts presented the name of George F. Edmunds. Intellectually the speaker easily took rank with the stronger men on the convention floor. The fact that the eminent senator he was sponsoring was not believed in voting strength to be seriously in the running seemed to inspire rather than to depress. Heaping encomium upon his as yet unnamed candidate he said, "it is a name that will carry all over the land a grateful feeling of serenity and security, like the benignant promise of a perfect day in June. It will be as wholesome and refreshing as the green mountains of the native state of him who bears it. Their summits tower not higher than his worth; their foundations are not firmer than his convictions and truth; the green and prolific slopes that grow great harvests at their feet are not richer than the fruitage of his long and lofty labors in the service of his country." In closing he nominated "The Honorable—aye the HONORABLE—George F. Edmunds of

Vermont." Magnificent in structure and impressive in delivery the speech won generous applause. It was not, however, a vote winning appeal, if, indeed, there were votes to be won. In making his man from Vermont appear lonely in possession of all the cardinal virtues and supereminent in statesmanship his terms and tone seemed intended to create the impression this was the only nomination fit to be made. There was stinging innuendo in the throaty "aye the HONORABLE."

There were many seconding speeches, ranking intellectually and rhetorically with those referred to, only one of which may be considered within the limits of this paper.

George William Curtis followed Governor Long in behalf of Senator Edmunds. After lauding to the limit the republican party as the embodiment of virtue, patriotism and achievement, in these withering terms he denounced the party in opposition.

> We are confronted with the democratic party, very hungry, and as you may well believe, very thirsty; a party without a single definite principle; a party without any distinct national policy which it dares to present to the country; a party which fell from power as a conspiracy against human rights, and now attempts to sneak back to power as a conspiracy for plunder and spoils.

Within a few hours the speaker had joined the party, without principle or policy, to help it sneak back to power as a conspiracy for plunder and spoils.

The call of states for nominating purposes was a very dilatory procedure. There was commotion in many delegations in the making up of the announcement of the vote by the chairman, which was frequently challenged for accuracy, requiring a roll call from the platform. Every announcement was followed by lung-testing capacity as to volume and duration.

Balloting was now the regular order. The hour was late, but a motion to adjourn was defeated by a margin of nineteen votes. A second call was proceeding when at 1:45 A. M. a motion by Major McKinley to suspend the further call and to vote by acclamation to adjourn until 11 o'clock "to-day", was carried with a whoop.

In the opening devotions on the morning of the fourth day an eminent clergyman sought Divine aid in the selection

of "the right man, and when he is selected that he may be elected by the common people," a sentiment in which all factions could amiably and fervently unite.

On the first ballot 818 votes were cast as follows: Blaine, 334½; Arthur, 278; Edmunds, 93; Logan, 63½; Sherman, 30; Hawley, 13; Robert Lincoln, 4; W. T. Sherman, 2.

On the second ballot Blaine gained 15 votes, Arthur lost 2 votes and there were small losses elsewhere.

On the third roll call the Blaine vote went to 375 with little other change.

On the part of the Blaine opposition there was demand for recess. The ballot resulted in its defeat by 84 votes.

Judge Foraker who had placed Senator Sherman in nomination now moved the nomination of Blaine by acclamation but protest was so strong as to cause withdrawal.

On the fourth ballot Blaine received 541 votes, Arthur, 207; Edmunds, 41; Hawley, 15; Logan, 7. Necessary to a choice 411 votes.

Before the fourth ballot was taken Senator Cullom received this telegram from General Logan:

> The republicans of the states that must elect the President having so strongly shown a preference for Mr. Blaine, I deem it my duty not to stand in the way of the peoples choice, and recommend to my friends that they assist in making this nomination.

The nomination of General Logan as a candidate for Vice President was a foregone conclusion. No presidential candidate before the convention had more friends and fewer enemies among the delegates and it was generally understood that his name would add strength to the national ticket.

No man well informed and willing to face actuality could have entertained the slightest reasonable doubt that in its choice of a candidate for President the convention had registered the wishes of a vast majority of republican voters in republican states. After the convention this was frankly conceded by leading republican papers that had supported other candidates. No such popular demand was ever made for the nomination of any presidential candidate, with the possible exception of Henry Clay.

The most influential bolt on the part of any man or any ele-

ment having part in the convention was that of Curtis, who as editor of *Harpers Weekly* was able to be vitally effective in the state of New York where the Cleveland plurality was only 1149.

Off the record this personal incident may be of interest: In company with a number of Iowa friends I called upon Mr. Blaine at his residence in Washington a few months after the November election. None of us could so presume on a basis of personal acquaintance, but we were graciously received by the Senator who expressed a weight of obligation to our state for its enduringly loyal support. He frankly considered phases of the disastrous campaign without the least indication of rancor or despair. A visitor bolder than the others bluntly asked Mr. Blaine if he did not think he would have received the support of Curtis and Harpers if he had given them the publication of his *Twenty years of Congress.* Without hesitation the reply was: "Yes," smilingly adding, "and I would better have done it, too."

The loss of New York State, and in consequence, the election, rested more upon other factors than that of the publication or non-publication of Blaine's memoirs. In justice to Curtis, it should be noted that he had a well known reputation as a liberal republican, had been a "Half Breed" in 1880, and previous to the convention in Chicago had inclined towards Grover Cleveland, Blaine's successful opponent. The two major factors contributing to Blaine's loss of New York was his attendance at a very exclusive and almost secret dinner of wealthy Republican sponsors at Delmonico's in New York City a few days before the close of the campaign, and perhaps even more, upon the indiscreet remark, to say the least, of a certain Reverend Burchard, made in the presence of the "Plumed Knight," identifying the Democratic party as one of "Rum, Romanism, and Rebellion."

As everyone knows, Blaine continued his long and useful career, notably rendering distinguished service as Secretary of State under President Harrison.