

## The Democratic Convention

Democrats arriving in Baltimore for their national convention, called for June 25, were jubilant. Their ancient enemy, the Republican party, had split into two warring segments, and all indications were that 1912 was to be a Democratic year. They felt that any one of the leading contenders for the nomination could be almost sure of election in November, pitted as he would be against a divided opponent. Only one Democrat was sure that this time it must not be just "any one"; one man sensed that the American voter in 1912, be he Republican or Democrat, was also progressive. And that man was William Jennings Bryan, three times loser, but still a power in his party.

The Democrats had any number of candidates to choose from: there were four leading contenders and a great quantity of favorite sons. Champ Clark of Missouri, Democratic Speaker of the House, led the field, closely followed by Governor Woodrow Wilson of New Jersey, Representative Oscar W. Underwood of Alabama, and Governor Judson Harmon of Ohio. Clark entered the convention with more pledged delegates than any one of his opponents, but he was far from the two-



thirds required for nomination in the Democratic convention.

Iowa Democrats were divided in their enthusiasms between Clark and Wilson, with the edge going to Clark. In fact, Clark's support was strong throughout the Middle West, where he was better known than the New Jersey governor. However, Wilson had visited Des Moines in March, and had spoken to a crowd of some 4,500 at the Coliseum. He had also addressed a banquet in his honor at Davenport. Many Wilson Leagues had been formed throughout the state, but they could not combat the strong Clark sentiment among Iowa Democrats. The state convention was held in Burlington on May 16, and the twenty-six delegates to the national convention, bound by the unit rule, were instructed for Clark, in spite of efforts by the Wilson forces to send an uninstructed delegation.

As in Chicago, so in Baltimore, the conservative wing of the party planned to dominate the convention. Efforts of the Tammany forces to foist Alton B. Parker, the 1908 Democratic nominee, on the convention as temporary chairman ran headlong into the powerful William Jennings Bryan. Made aware of what was going on, Bryan wired each possible candidate, asking for support against the Tammany influence. Some did not reply, others were indefinite in their answers (including Champ Clark), but one man instantly came to Bryan's



side in the contest — Woodrow Wilson of New Jersey. It might be said that this action, if not determining, was at least influential in making Wilson President of the United States. Bryan alone seemed aware of the fact that the Democrats must nominate a Progressive; otherwise, there was a strong possibility that many Progressive Democrats would join the Roosevelt bandwagon in November.

The Democratic national convention was a series of battles, hard fought and hard won. Bryan lost the first round, when Parker became the temporary chairman; but he won the second with a resolution disavowing any support for the Democratic nominee from such monied interests as represented by J. P. Morgan, Thomas F. Ryan, and August Belmont. Another victory for Wilson came when the convention discarded the unit rule (whereby the majority of each state delegation determined the vote of the whole group) except in those cases where the states themselves had specifically provided for it. Bryan also won a measure of victory in the election of his choice, Ollie James of Kentucky, as permanent chairman.

All this was not accomplished without great bitterness. The conservatives fought Bryan at every turn, reported the Washington correspondent of the *Des Moines Register*. "They abuse him and curse him. All the vials of wrath are being poured out upon him. . . ." But the great mass of the



delegates listened to Bryan, and they followed him. As reports from the convention hall went out to the country, the mails and the telegraph wires brought back the word from the voters at home: "Stand with Bryan."

At eight o'clock on the evening of June 27, after two days of parliamentary skirmishing, the nominating speeches began. The first name to be placed before the delegates was that of Oscar W. Underwood of Alabama. His nomination set off a twenty-minute cheering spree. A Cleveland reporter described the scene:

They shouted and sang, marched and blew horns. They stamped and clapped their hands. Various noise-making devices were called into action. They did all this for the purpose of impressing the Convention with the charm of their candidate and his power of making his friends eager to serve him and advance his interests.

After so much noise had been made over Underwood . . . the candidates with more delegates . . . had to show how little twenty minutes of uproar meant when weighed in their scale. So the Clark partisans did an hour and five minutes what the smaller body of Underwood admirers had done for one-third of that period.

And then it was up to Governor Wilson's followers to beat the Clark outbreak. They did it. The Wilson "demonstration" was kept going, somehow, for an hour and fifteen minutes, and when it was over the efforts of the admirers of three candidates to help their cause along had consumed two hours and forty minutes of a wild and weary night.

And a wild and weary night it was. At 7:15 on



the morning of June 28 the exhausted delegates finally adjourned. Observers were of one opinion: this sort of thing could not go on. It was "unworthy of grown men gathered for a serious purpose." How could such men, asked one newspaper, deny the vote to women because they were too prone to "emotional outbursts." The Springfield *Republican* likewise looked askance at convention habits, pointing out the folly of a "yelling match, with the participants each year trying to break the record." But, concluded the editor, such practices are already doomed — they will soon be replaced by presidential primaries. The Des Moines *Register* deplored actions which, if indulged in in private life, would commit men "to a retreat."

The exhausted delegates gathered at 4 P.M. on June 28 to proceed to the nomination of a president. On July 2 they were still balloting. In all, it took forty-six ballots to decide the 1912 Democratic presidential nomination. Part of this long struggle was the result of the Democratic two-thirds rule, part of it to the fact that the followers of the four leading candidates were stubborn men, unwilling to yield to the inevitable. On the first ballot Clark, the favorite, received  $440\frac{1}{2}$  votes; Wilson, 324; Harmon, 148; and Underwood,  $117\frac{1}{2}$ . By the fifth ballot Clark had 443; Wilson, 351; Harmon,  $141\frac{1}{2}$ , and Underwood,  $119\frac{1}{2}$ . To win the nomination, 728 votes were needed.



New York, with its huge block of 90 votes, stayed with Harmon until the tenth ballot, when their votes were switched to Clark. No stampede followed, however, and the roll calls droned wearily on. On the fourteenth ballot William Jennings Bryan rose from his place with the Nebraska delegation (which supported Clark) and announced in an impassioned speech that he would henceforth withhold his vote from Clark as long as Tammany-controlled New York voted for him. Slowly the balance began to turn. The Iowa delegation was growing restive under a barrage of wires from home demanding that they stand with Bryan. On the twenty-fourth ballot, late on Saturday, the second day of balloting, a poll of the Iowa delegation still kept the state's vote in the Clark column. After two more ballots the tired delegates adjourned until Monday.

On Monday, July 1, eight more ballots were taken. On the second ballot of the day — the twenty-eighth of the convention — Wilson's total at last pushed ahead of Clark's. Two ballots later Iowa switched from Clark to Wilson. Clark, emulating Roosevelt, had left Washington for Baltimore to try to save his wavering campaign, but he arrived too late.

The record of vote after vote seemed dry enough, but they were actually taken in the midst of an almost constant tumult.

It was halloing, yelling, screaming, roaring, raised to the



*nth* power; they "hollered," simply hollered, for an hour at a time. When a telling speech was successfully shouted or a significant vote was cast, they carried banners up and down and around the aisles; they reared mammoth pictures of candidates against the galleries; they sent up toy balloons, and tossed pigeons into the air; . . . men and women shied hats through the air; horns, whistles, and infernal contrivances without name contributed to the diabolical din. . . . Uproar that shattered the voice of a new chairman every five minutes, and wore out fresh platoons of police every hour; the efforts of bands drowned under the vocal din, and the chromatic clamor of banners assailed the delegates and left them stubborn at their posts. At Chicago they stood pat to the end. At Baltimore they changed, but they refused to stampede.

On Tuesday, July 2, the end came at last. On the first ballot of the day Illinois switched from Clark to Wilson, thus dooming Clark's chances. But still the roll calls went on, with slight gains here, and slighter losses there, until in all there had been forty-five. As the clerk prepared to begin the forty-sixth ballot, a clamor rose from the floor. The delegates had seen Senator Bankhead of Alabama making his way to the platform. This could mean but one thing — Underwood was withdrawing. Bankhead was followed by Senator Stone of Missouri who withdrew the name of Champ Clark. One by one, the other contenders released their delegates. New York suggested that the nomination of Wilson be made by acclamation, but Missouri, determined to cast one more vote for



"old Champ Clark," refused. So one more roll call — the forty-sixth — was shouted through the megaphone of the clerk, and 990 of the delegates gave their votes to Woodrow Wilson.

It was a great victory for the New Jersey governor, but perhaps even a greater victory for Bryan. "Chicago was a battle; Baltimore has been a game," wrote a reporter in *The Outlook*. "At Chicago and at Baltimore there was the same oligarchy, employed on behalf of the same interests. At Chicago the methods of the oligarchy were those of the highwayman. At Baltimore they were the methods of the card-sharper." But no matter what the methods, the "special interests" and the "bosses" had lost at Chicago and at Baltimore. At Chicago, in winning, they broke their party and lost the election; at Baltimore, in losing, their party was saved and the candidate they had opposed became, in the well-worn political phrase, "the next President of the United States."

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