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"DEMOCRACY'S JAMBOREE"

*How Parties Pick Representatives in the
United States*

(Described for "The Listener" by A.M.R.)

TWO weeks ago, the National Convention of the Republican Party of the United States assembled in Chicago and chose Thomas E. Dewey for Presidential candidate. In a week or two the opposing Democratic Party will reply with a convention somewhere else. No man who is not chosen at one or other of these quadrennial conventions ever has any possibility of becoming President. Yet conventions themselves are "mass dementia . . . hokum and hogwash . . . hypocritical slaver . . . a flow of drivel and a paroxysm of din," according to one American writer. "Raucous farce" foams another. "Orgy of inanity" explodes a third. The "degradation of democracy . . . haywire and hogwallow . . ." contributes a fourth.

The writers of textbooks on political science are more restrained. "This typically American institution," Dr. Overacker explains, continues very largely because it "offers a variety of popular amusement very dear to American hearts." "Big Show," laconically comments Charles A. Beard. And Professor Harold Laski, observing from Britain that "the critics of the system have exhausted the language of vituperation upon it," nevertheless opines that "its fantastic . . . incredible . . . hectic . . . character can never suffer exaggeration."

Well, after all that, what is, what can be, a convention?

How Conventions Began

Briefly put, conventions are the gatherings, some four months ahead of each Presidential election, at which American political parties write their platforms, pick their candidates for President and Vice-President, and appoint their National Executives for the next four years. They date to 1832,

when President Andrew Jackson resolved a stalemate between himself and three other Democratic candidates (different sections had nominated them all) by calling a monster nation-wide congress of party delegates. Jackson was a picturesque figure. His election marked the upsurge of the uncouth Western pioneers against the Republic's earlier genteel traditions. These "Kaintuks" celebrated his election by a night of bonfires and keg-parties on the immaculate lawns of White House. Jackson himself turned out "the old gang" from every office down to village



THOMAS E. DEWEY
*The result of the first "paroxysm
of din."*

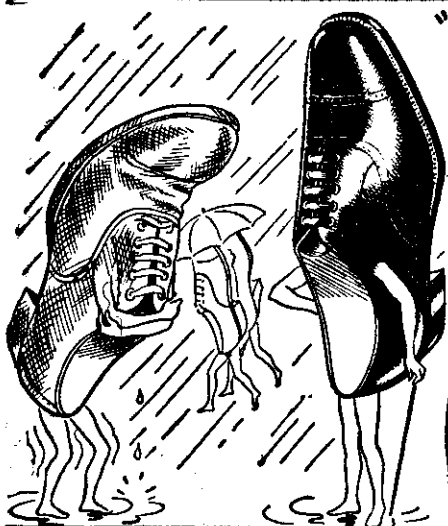
postmaster to put in good "party men." His invention, the Party Convention, bears the imprint of its founder and of its birth times.

The delegates are chosen democratically by the party organisations in each State. They assemble in some huge hall—a, round thousand of them, plus another thousand "alternates," plus ten to twenty thousand spectators. Chicago, New York and Philadelphia are the frequent venues, not merely because they have halls of sufficient size and a convention tradition, but because they usually bid highest. Chicago contributed 130,000 dollars to get the Democrats in 1940; Philadelphia 250,000 dollars to attract the Republicans. The tale of the hill billy delegate who sold a cow for four dollars on leaving home to pay his expenses and was charged four dollars for his first breakfast explains this eagerness.

The Show Itself

One-third professional politicians, one-third lawyers, and one-third mere people, the convention seats itself by delegations, each under its State banner and led by its chairman or "keynoter." Most carry symbols and transparencies. Many include hired singers. Some have brass bands. Prayer opens each session, discreetly distributed among Catholic,

(continued on next page)



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make you miserable
if you had a daily
dose of NUGGET
like I do"*



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