

Changing Fashions in Presidential Campaigns

By BRANDER MATTHEWS

THE old order changes; and, as the French proverb puts it, everything passes, everything wears, everything breaks.

There are fashions in politics as there are in petticoats, and now that the petticoats are in politics the modes and manners of electioneering may be modified even more rapidly in the future than they have been in the past. Three-score years ago, the Tuesday following the first Monday in November was often a day of disorder and sometimes it was a day of riot. Now it is a decorous day when we drop our ballots into the box, when—as the late J. Pierpont Morgan's grandfather declared—there is

A weapon that comes down as still
As snowflakes fall upon the sod,
But executes a freeman's will,
—As lightning does the will of God.

Sixty years ago the machinery of American politics was far more spectacular than it is now. It was then the custom for one or both of the two chief parties to indulge in torch-light processions in the fortnight before election. I recall that as a special favor I was allowed to sit up to see the parade of the wide-awakes up or down Fifth Avenue.

I cannot now remember whether the marchers went uptown or downtown as they passed our door. A wide-awake, it may be well to explain, was a brief cape of oilcloth intended to preserve the coats of the paraders from the oil which might drip from their flaming lamps. New York was a Democratic city in 1860, and the parade of the wide-awakes was intended to impress the inhabitants and to compel them to take notice of the goodly number of voters who intended to cast their ballots for Abraham Lincoln. It was a cumbersome and an expensive manifestation, but it served its purpose.

In the score or two of years that followed 1860 there were other torch-light processions up or down Fifth Avenue, Democratic, most of them, and largely composed, as I visualize the marchers, of lads who were having a good time, but who would have to wait a while before they attained to man's estate, when they could hope to cast their first ballot. The last evening parade that I can now remember preceded the election of Hugh J. Grant as Mayor of New York. No doubt there were many more in other cities at other elections. And then the fashion passed; and the various organizations relinquished the futile effort to win votes by the intermittent discharge of rockets and by the persistent popping of Roman candles. In 1880 my friend, H. C. Bunner (almost the earliest lyricist of Manhattan), wrote a little poem on "A Campaign Procession."

I blazed like a meteor through the night
In the great parade of the great campaign,
A smoke-tailed comet of yellow light
I wavered and sputtered through wind and rain.
High over the surging crowd I tossed,
A beacon of battle, flickering free;
And now the contest is gained or lost,
And victor and victim are one to me.
No more my spirit of flame shall thrill
As then; no more shall it leap and play
When the moment's madness mas-

No more! By November's night-winds fanned,
In the gusty lee of a Bowery porch,
You may see me lighting a peanut stand
The battered wreck of a campaign torch.

But if the torches ceased to flare and flutter and if the fireworks were retired into innocuous desuetude, the parade survived, doing its useful work by day and not by night. When we consider the narrow margin by which Cleveland won the Presidency in 1884 we must admit that one of the elements which brought about this fortunate result was the impressiveness of the business men's parade which marched

There were a host of others in other elections, a few of which—E. D. Mansfield's "Scott," W. A. Crafts's "Grant," James S. Brisbins "Garfield," G. F. Parker's "Cleveland," B. Andrews's "McKinley," R. L. Metcalf's "Bryan"—are in collection in the reference department of the New York Public Library.

At Bowdoin, Hawthorne had been a classmate of Longfellow, although these two outstanding figures in American literature were apparently not specially attracted to one another in their undergraduate days. The one enduring friendship that Hawthorne formed in college was with Pierce, who was in the class above him, and who was with him on the trip to the mountains where

England passed through the port of Liverpool, the fees amounted to a tidy sum every year; and Hawthorne was highly indignant when a fixed salary was given to the Consul in lieu of the fees. He protested that this reduction in the income of the office ought not to take effect until after the conclusion of his term.

When Howells wrote one of half a dozen campaign biographies of Lincoln he was only an obscure newspaper man working on a little Ohio journal. Lincoln followed the custom of those distant days by appointing Howells as Consul in Venice. But, in the sixteen years between the nomination of Lincoln and that of James Garfield had come

books about Roosevelt and there were several about Wilson before they were elected; but I do not recall any life of either which was strictly a campaign biography.

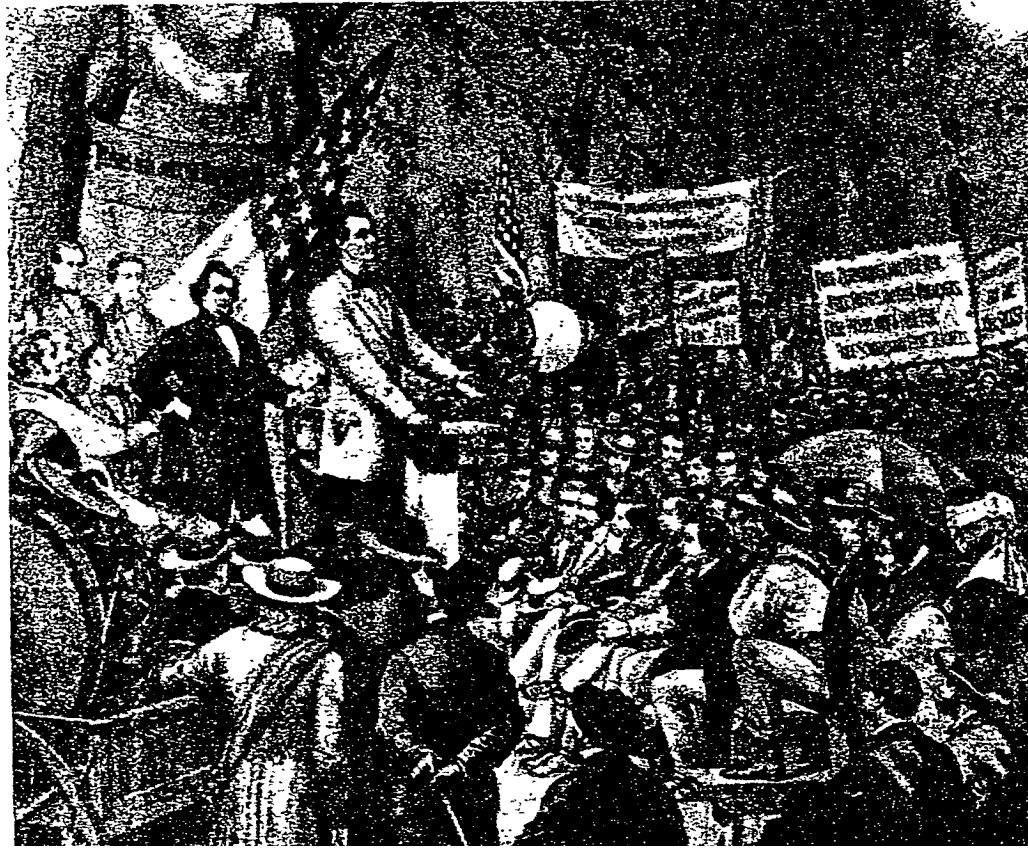
In fact, I was about to say that in this twentieth century the campaign biography had ceased to be, but a friend has just sent an advertisement announcing two volumes, issued by the same publisher and declared to be "Authoritative Books on the Presidential Candidates." One is the "Life and Recent Speeches of Warren G. Harding," by Frederick E. Shortmeir, and the other is "Progressive Democracy of James M. Cox," by Charles E. Morris. One of these is certainly a campaign biography, and possibly the other is also.

In spite of this evidence to the contrary, the campaign biography has lost the vogue it had three score and ten years ago—even if it has not become extinct. Its companion, the campaign songbook, has long since departed this life. And instead of them, we now have the campaign textbook, issued officially by the managers of the two parties.

It is interesting to note that the campaign biography has not been necessary either in England or in France. In England the Prime Minister is never a man who needs to be introduced to the voters; he is always a man who has won his way to the front by decades of public life. And in France there are no electoral campaigns, at least not for the Presidency. The choice is made, not by the voters at large, but by the members of the two houses, and the election takes place as soon as the vacancy occurs. When Carnot was assassinated, Casimir-Perier was seated as President in time to walk in the funeral procession of his murdered predecessor.

Although the campaign biography does not exist today in any other country, we Americans must not flatter ourselves that we invented it. We can take credit for many an ingenious device in practical politics and in applied science, but not for that. Caesar's "Commentary on the Gallic War" is in fact a campaign autobiography. It was written by Caesar to explain and to justify his acts in Gaul—acts which had been denounced and misrepresented by his many enemies in Rome. If he was to attain to imperial power, he needed to conciliate, and, above all, he needed to explain and to set forth plainly what it was he had done for the glory of the republic. It is as though Grant had published his "Personal Memoirs" at the time when he was asking his fellow-citizens to give him a third term in the Presidency, and there is a compelling likeness between the two documents in the unadorned simplicity and the grave dignity with which these successful soldiers recorded their own deeds. In Grant's case the absence of ornament, the avoidance of "fipe writing," was natural to the man; in Caesar's it was the result of deliberate and consummate art. Cicero, a master of style himself and a master critic of style, called the "Commentaries" a work of high value, resembling a beautiful antique statue, "as free from ornaments as that is from drapery and owing its beauty to its nudity."

P. S.: Just as I penned the final paragraph of this little paper, I received notes from two distinguished historians, to whom I had applied for information, calling my attention to the fact that no less a man of letters than George Bancroft had written a campaign biography, that of Martin Van Buren, prepared in 1844, when it was supposed that Little Van would receive the Democratic nomination. Most unexpectedly Polk was nominated, so Bancroft laid aside his manuscript which was not published until nearly half a century later—long after Van Buren had died and only a little while before Bancroft's own



for hours up Broadway and Fifth Avenue. (This time, I am certain that the start was downtown. And equally impressive was the sound money parade in 1896, which helped to make more certain the defeat of the advocate of free silver and the victory of the advocate of the gold standard. Not to be forgotten are the successive parades of the women who wanted the vote—and who got it. Perhaps the next few years will see other parades on Saturday afternoons intended to help along other causes.

There is one political device, however, which seems to have outlived its usefulness. This is the campaign biography, at least one for each of the rival Presidential candidates, prepared to proclaim the merits as well as to narrate the leading incidents of their lives. These biographies were, for the most part, unpretending books, hastily put together to attain immediate results. Perhaps it is because they were artless that William R. Thayer, in his recent study of the "Art of Biography" has not found it necessary to mention any one of these. Yet at least four of these campaign biographies were written by authors of standing. No less a man of letters than Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote the campaign life of Franklin Pierce in 1852; William Dean Howells prepared in 1860 a campaign life of Lincoln, and in 1873 a campaign life of Hayes; and in 1888 Lew Wallace was responsible

he died. When Pierce was unexpectedly nominated, Hawthorne had just attained fame by the publication of "The Scarlet Letter," and it was natural that the politician should ask the aid of the man of letters. It was also natural that Hawthorne should hesitate to comply with his friend's request. That he did finally undertake the unwelcome task was perhaps due to a recognition of the fact that Pierce needed all the support his intimates could give him.

When Pierce was nominated he was almost unknown to the nation; and even in his own State there was no exaggerated opinion of his qualifications for the Presidency. This was illustrated by a story current at the time—a story which may very well have been invented by one of Pierce's opponents and which none the less expressed the truth, even if it did not record a fact. A visitor to the White Mountains, taking his seat beside the stage driver, remarked that he supposed New Hampshire was rejoicing at the probable election of a New Hampshire man to the Presidency. "Well," returned the stage driver, "I don't know about that. You see Frank Pierce is a big man up here in New Hampshire, but come to spread him out over the whole United States, and he'll be pretty considerably thin!"

Pierce was elected and he promptly rewarded Hawthorne by appointing him Consul at Liverpool, the most lucrative office in the service. As

the front as a man of letters. He and Hayes were kin—that is, they were second or third cousins; and perhaps this was the reason why the novelist wrote the life of one candidate. Apparently Hayes preferred to Howells a position either in the Diplomatic or the Consular Service. Howells declined it; but he took advantage of the relationship to suggest to the new President that Lowell might be persuaded to go abroad as American Minister. In his delightful record of his "Literary Friends and Acquaintances" Howells tells us how he assured Hayes that he was acting without Lowell's privity. "I got back such a letter as I could wish in its delicate sense of the situation. . . . He gave me the pleasure, a pleasure beyond any other I could imagine, of asking Lowell whether he would accept the mission to Austria." After a day or two of reflection Lowell declined; but he remarked, "I should like to see a play of Calderon's." And when the man appointed to Spain was found willing to go to Austria, Lowell was sent to London and to make a new reputation in his maturity—all more or less the result of Howells's campaign biography.

G. F. Parker wrote the campaign biography of Cleveland, and as a reward he was made Consul in London. Lew Wallace prepared the necessary narrative about Harrison, but, as he had already been our Minister to Turkey, we may safely assume that no consulship was of