

STRANGE POINTS ABOUT A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION.

Although many Montrealers, especially those of them who are engaged in financial and other business pursuits, take a keen interest in the presidential contest which is going on in the great republic to the south of us, few of them probably are aware of the faultiness, the grave faultiness, of the American constitution in regard to the election of a president.

In the first place, the "national" conventions, at which each of the candidates is nominated, have no constitutional sanction whatever. The framers of that instrument never for a moment contemplated their existence. They have gradually grown up outside the pale of the federal law, until at the present time they are a real and an important factor in the government of the country. This fact is all the more serious because of the clumsiness, the irregularities, and, oftentimes, the corruptness, which characterize their proceedings; and which must make Canadians who study these things prouder than ever of their own constitution and their own methods of nominating candidates for the highest positions in public life. At every American national convention there are a large number of "contested" delegates—that is, of delegates who have no right to take part in its deliberations and vote for or against the candidates proposed. The proper procedure would be for the national committee on credentials, a body appointed by the convention, to apportion to each state its due share of representatives, and to reject all others who claimed a seat. This is never done. The reason seems to be that the "bosses" who manage the national conventions are solely concerned with having their favorite candidate nominated. The committee on credentials is composed of nominees of these managers; and their business is to "seat" those delegates only who are in favor of the candidate preferred by the "bosses." President McKinley, for instance, was the choice of the whole Republican party on the present occasion. Suppose that the delegates had selected somebody else, instead of ratifying the party's will. The party would of course be rent asunder, and Mr. McKinley would have little chance of being elected. In ordinary presidential years this is a real danger. This one has been exceptional, in that both candidates were the unanimous choice of their respective parties. A number of delegates are for no candidate at all. "We are for sale," as one of them said recently.

But the second point is the more serious danger of the two, and shows to Canadians how amazingly conservative their American neighbors are in respect of their defective constitution. We refer to the Elec-

toral College. The Twelfth Amendment of the United States Constitution provides that if no candidate obtains a majority of votes in the Electoral College, the House of Representatives shall immediately by ballot choose the president from among those—not exceeding three in number—who have polled the highest number of votes. But in choosing the President the votes shall be taken by states, the representation from each state having one vote only, and a quorum for this purpose shall consist of two-thirds of these votes, a majority being necessary to a choice. Just think, ye Montrealers, of the possibilities which such a law permits! Suppose the free-silver representatives in the House of Representatives could rally together the Congressmen from sixteen states—ominous number! and induce them to refrain from taking any part in the election for President, the remaining twenty-nine states, being fewer than the required two-thirds, could not proceed, as there would be no quorum, and the consequence would be that no President would be elected. The constitution provides that in such an event the Vice-President is to act as President; but as he is to be elected by the Senate in a manner similar to that described in regard to the House of Representatives and the President, the same absence of a quorum might be arranged, and thus there would be neither a President nor a Vice-President. A law recently passed provided that if both the President and the Vice-President die, the Secretary of State shall be President, and so on down to the member of the Cabinet lowest in rank. But this law only provides for a contingency that may arise during the presidential term. It has no application to the difficulty which may present itself at a period between the close of one presidential term and the beginning of another. The spectacle, therefore, of a Presidentless United States is quite possible under the existing American constitution.

The Electoral College is such an anomaly that, if it existed in Canada in regard to the election of a Premier, it would soon be abolished. On several occasions the candidate who has obtained the largest number of the national votes has received the smallest number of the votes of the members of the Electoral College. To illustrate how ridiculous it is in operation, it is only necessary to compare our own Province of Quebec with the State of New York. Had we an Electoral College for the election of Prime Minister, the party which polled, say, fifty votes, more than the other party, throughout the province, would win the whole 65 Federal votes of the province for its candidate, the opposite party being practically disfranchised entirely by the votes of those fifty electors. Canadians would not tolerate that state of things one single parliamentary session.