

THE UNMAKING OF A PRESIDENT: 1889-92

BY JAMES A. KEHL*

DURING Grover Cleveland's first administration, the Republicans were out of the presidency and away from the trough of executive patronage for the first time since they had come to power under Abraham Lincoln. They yearned to return to control of the offices they had administered uninterruptedly for a quarter century and immediately began to lay their plans. As they reflected during these four years, they came to the conclusion that they had not been defeated in 1884 by such incidents as Reverend Burchard's "rum, Romanism, and rebellion" remark, but by corrupt Democratic voting and counting practices, particularly in New York City.¹ To make certain that these were not repeated in the 1888 election, the Republicans selected the most aggressive practical politician on the horizon to be the national campaign chairman. This was Matt Quay, the junior United States senator from Pennsylvania.

Republican trust was properly placed. Quay directed a flamboyant campaign which elected Benjamin Harrison. As a reward for his efforts, he fully expected to have a major voice in the distribution of the patronage, but Harrison was determined that he would not bargain with, or surrender to, either Quay or any other of the spoilsmen. Unfortunately for the party this difference was not resolved, but grew in intensity as the Harrison Administration unfolded.

Since Pennsylvania was the most Republican of states in this era, Quay and his Keystone colleagues were distressed and incensed by the President's attitude. At a critical point, the senator and several of his lieutenants called on Harrison to impress him with the urgency in making certain Pennsylvania appointments for which they had been clamoring. The President seemed un-

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¹ *The Great Conspiracy of Four Years Ago: An Inside History of the Remarkable Campaign in Which Harrison Defeated Cleveland* (Philadelphia, 1892), 7; "Matthew Stanley Quay: A Man of the People" (a political pamphlet in the Quay Family Papers, Archives of Industrial Society, University of Pittsburgh), [c. 1898], 2.

concerned and gave them little encouragement. In desperation Quay said to him: "Mr. President, you cannot afford to ignore those people who made your election possible." To this point-blank jab, Harrison assumed his most solemn pose, rolled his eyes piously toward the ceiling, lifted himself as high as possible on his toes, and replied: "Senator, God Almighty made me President." Quay responded with a look that would curdle milk and said: "Let's see if God can re-elect you."²

With this, he and his henchmen made an indecorous exit and headed for Chamberlain's in the hope that a little liquid refreshment would give them strength to carry on. En route they met the celebrated agnostic Robert Ingersoll and blurted out the details of their encounter with the President. When told that Harrison had credited the Almighty with his election, the profane Ingersoll exclaimed, "Well, I have heard some pretty tough charges preferred against God Almighty, but I don't think that I ever heard that he was guilty of anything so bad as that."³

Quay thoroughly enjoyed Ingersoll's retort and repeated it frequently in exhibiting his displeasure over Harrison's ingratitude for his campaign leadership. The senator believed that his actions had represented the margin of victory. Advised that a private census of New York City was essential to prevent "illegal" Democratic votes from again being cast in 1888, Quay had secretly undertaken such a venture at a cost of \$100,000. Under the guise of a business enterprise engaged in developing a new city directory, a building had been rented on Broadway and a sign inscribed "New York City Directory" was hung on the door. There was absolutely no outward appearance of any political antecedents. With the exception of the director, none of the hundreds of employees knew that this was a master political stratagem.⁴

² *Chicago Herald*, October 29, 1889, in Press Comments, 53 volumes of newspaper clippings covering parts of Quay's career (1878 and 1888-1895) in the possession of the author (hereinafter cited as PC with appropriate volume and item designation), III, 1; *Pittsburgh Times*, April 23, 1891, PC, XXII, 357.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Disbursements of the Republican National Committee, 1888, Matthew Stanley Quay Papers in the possession of the author (hereinafter cited as MSQ Papers); *The Great Conspiracy*, 7; "The Strategy of National Campaigns," *McClure's Magazine*, XV (1900), 490.

Thousands of names were collected by canvassers, processed by clerks, and charted by draftsmen. The final result showed a geographic distribution of New York's population on hundreds of maps, each a drawing of a city block, each complete with every house, hotel, and tenement, and of course, the residence of every legal voter was noted. Two weeks before the election, Quay invited a prominent Democrat to a private viewing of his directory which he intended to deploy as a political weapon. *McClure's Magazine* vividly described how Quay explained that the piles of portfolios, stacked half-way to the ceiling, contained the names and addresses of all of the city's voters carefully arranged block by block and house by house. He pulled down a typical volume to illustrate his point to the Democratic onlooker, and with a wave of the hand, he added, "These books contain the names of the men who have a right to vote. If others vote, the jails will not be big enough to hold them."⁵

Simultaneously Quay was moving to attract New York's voters into the Republican camp. His techniques required more money than had ever been accumulated for a campaign in the past, and John Wanamaker was recruited as the finance chairman in an effort to tap the necessary contributors. With Philadelphia as the financial capital of the Republican Party, Wanamaker succeeded nobly, and Quay spent it all; in fact, he set the standard for future campaigning so high that thereafter comparatively few could compete.

When he first took charge of the National Committee, Quay established an Irish Bureau and gave greater attention to the ethnic vote than had been done before. He invited Patrick Ford, editor of *The Irish World* to submit a realistic program, with a realistic budget, to conduct a successful Republican campaign among the Irish Americans in New York City. Ford accepted the invitation, and his price tag primarily for ward organizers, speakers, mass meetings, and special mailings, was in excess of \$70,000. Quay must have approved Ford's plan; subsequently allocations in the amount of \$55,000 were made to him by the National Committee. Since there were Irish ele-

⁵ "Strategy," *McClure's*, XV, 491; Frank W. Leach, "Twenty Years with Quay," a series of newspaper articles originally appearing in *The North American* (Philadelphia) and collected into a scrapbook; a preliminary article was published July 3, 1904, with 42 detailed articles running in Sunday editions between September 18, 1904, and June 25, 1905.

ments that Ford could not reach, additional sums were necessary; in all the Republicans spent \$100,000 to win the Irish-American vote in New York City alone.⁶

Tom Platt also received liberal allocations from Quay's committee. During the final two weeks of the campaign he was assigned \$125,000, a sum unexplained by existing evidence. The National Committee's disbursement statement noted only that the funds were assigned to Platt for either the city campaign or for special purposes. Shortly after the election the Cincinnati *Enquirer* broke the story of Platt's political "inheritance" which Republicans had endeavored to keep secret. Quay took notice of this report and wrote to Harrison assuring him that all funds spent by Platt during the campaign were allocations "made upon consultation with me, at my request, and under my direction and that he used or received no money for any illegitimate purpose. . . ."⁷ Democrats were not convinced. When they learned that their candidate for governor carried New York City by 13,000 more votes than Cleveland, their candidate for President, they were certain what Platt had purchased with his \$125,000.

In November, 1888, Republicans did not have time for such post-mortems; they were too anxious to celebrate their victory to examine how it had been won. Quay was applauded by his party leaders as the "greatest political general" in the nation's first century of partisan politics and eulogized in the party press as a master strategist. Such praise was actually "wasted" on him; the only reward that mattered was the patronage that he expected to control; of course, the greater the accolades, the more patronage he came to expect. Harrison wrote to Quay expressing his appreciation for the "brilliant work done during the campaign" and suggested that they confer in Indianapolis at Quay's convenience. Being a practical-minded politician, Quay took this to mean that the President-elect was prepared to talk about practical rewards. He was particularly optimistic when Harrison advised him that he would conclude nothing "in which you are likely to be interested . . . before our conference."⁸

⁶ Disbursements of the Republican National Committee, 1888; statement of "Mr. Ford's Requirements" for organizing New York City, MSQ Papers.

⁷ Disbursements of the Republican National Committee, 1888; Matthew S. Quay to Benjamin Harrison, January 18, 1889, The Papers of Benjamin Harrison, 1848-1901, Library of Congress.

⁸ Benjamin Harrison to Matthew S. Quay, November 22, 1888, MSQ Papers.

When Quay finally went to Indianapolis in mid-December, 1888, he had only a few points which he wished to convey. He wanted it to be eminently clear that he did not seek a cabinet post for himself. He did, however, desire to impress the President-elect with the wisdom of having both a Pennsylvanian and a Southerner in the cabinet. With reference to the latter, he believed that the election results had exposed potential weaknesses in the solid Democratic South; he wanted his party to exploit them. Republicans could at last make great strides toward becoming a truly national party if they hung out a sign of encouragement, and the appointment of a Southerner to the President's official family, he believed, would be interpreted as such a sign.

Quay did not consider his responsibility for promoting specific appointments as nearly so crucial, but he did hope to see John Sherman, Thomas Platt, and James Clarkson named to the cabinet. He also recognized an obligation to support Wanamaker for his efforts during the campaign in "frying the fat" out of the business leadership of the nation. At the same time he recommended that both James G. Blaine and Wanamaker be sent on diplomatic missions, away from the center of the political stage. Ultimately, to his chagrin, both Wanamaker and Blaine were invited into the cabinet while none of Quay's first choices were considered.

When Quay arrived for his conference with the President-elect, he was escorted by his secretary into the parlor where he met for the first time the man whose campaign he had directed. Grasping Quay's hand, Harrison said solemnly, "Providence has given us the victory." Outwardly polite and placid, but inwardly chilled and shaken, Quay made no immediate reply to Harrison's blind faith in preordination. In relating this greeting to A. K. McClure some time later, Quay referred to the President-elect as a "political tenderfoot" for suggesting that the Almighty had wrested New York from the Democrats. To McClure he exploded: "Think of the man! He ought to know that Providence hadn't a damn thing to do with it" and suggested that Harrison will probably "never learn how close a number of men were compelled to approach the gates of the penitentiary to make him President."⁹

⁹ *New York Herald*, December 20, 1888, PC, II, 1334; Alexander K.

The senator and the President-elect conferred privately for two hours, and no details of their discussion ever emerged. To what extent Quay had an opportunity to present his ideas is not known, but after the session, they shook hands amicably, and Quay returned to his hotel with a thumping headache. Journalists on hand for the conference suggested brightly that it had been brought on by Harrison. The weeks and months that followed spelled out in harrowing detail the accuracy of their supposition. When time for the afternoon train to Washington arrived, Quay was at the station. His short stay and sudden departure surprised everyone, but he gave no verbal hint of displeasure and said, "I don't know how other people get along with General Harrison, but I can get along with him all right."¹⁰

To Tom Platt, his trusted ally, Quay was more candid. Upon returning to Washington he confided to him that he had been unable to reach any agreements in Indianapolis. According to Platt's description of the senator's report, "The President-elect was all ears and no tongue" and "turned a frigid and contemptuous shoulder."¹¹ Although he refused to admit it publicly, Quay had learned from that brief conference that it would be most difficult to dictate any appointment to Harrison.

Platt also came to this conclusion. He believed that he had received a pre-election pledge from Harrison through Stephen B. Elkins that he would inherit the portfolio of the Treasury Department in the event of a Republican victory. After the election the New York boss expected his appointment to be announced at any time, but the report from Quay's visit and a month of additional silence caused him to become impatient and suspicious. Without mentioning the treasury post specifically, he wrote a threatening letter addressed to a Harrison assistant, Louis Michener, but obviously intended for the President-elect. Expressing his analysis of the power and preferences of the Republican masses in New York, he concluded that "the true fact is that the whole power of the party in this state, which

McClure, *Old Time Notes of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1905), II, 572-573; Herbert A. Gibbons, *John Wanamaker* (New York, 1926), I, 260.

¹⁰ *New York Tribune*, December 20 and 21, 1888, PC, II, 1335 and 1345; *New York World*, December 22, 1888, PC, II, 1352.

¹¹ Thomas C. Platt to Russell A. Alger, December 25, 1888, Russell A. Alger Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan; Thomas C. Platt, *Autobiography* (New York, 1910), 210.

is able to bring about results, is at my back."¹² Whether Harrison agreed or not is uncertain, but he refused to be coerced. He declared that he had never made a commitment to Platt, appointed William Windom of Minnesota to be Secretary of the Treasury, and opened a breach with New York Republicans that he was never able to close.

Since Hayes, Garfield, and Arthur had snubbed Pennsylvania in forming their cabinets, Quay was desperate to have a Pennsylvanian in the cabinet for the sake of party morale. Thus, he had no alternative but to appear to support the President's choice of Wanamaker to be postmaster general, but this endorsement proved to be a Pyrrhic victory. Having developed an appetite for politics which he construed as an aptitude, Wanamaker shortly became the senator's "bitterest and most dangerous foe" and sapped much of his political strength for more than a decade.¹³

Harrison regarded the appointment of Wanamaker as a sop to Quay's National Committee, because he had served as finance chairman and was determined that only one individual linked in any way to the Committee would be appointed to the cabinet. With more and more information concerning the "fat frying" techniques of the past campaign becoming public, Harrison was fearful lest his cabinet appointments be stigmatized as "pay offs." At the time reform Republicans in Pennsylvania, headed by Wharton Barker, considered Wanamaker to be a Quay ally and rebuked the President even for this appointment.¹⁴

Throughout the period in which Harrison was formulating his cabinet, he remained extremely sensitive to public opinion. He wanted to remove all possible doubt that the cabinet appointments were a series of rewards for services rendered. When Carl Schurz, a political reformer, challenged Wanamaker's campaign integrity, Harrison overreacted; he assumed that his designee as postmaster general was guilty until proved innocent. This startling revelation came on March 3, on the eve of the inauguration.

Harrison summoned Quay to his apartment in the Arlington

¹² Thomas C. Platt to Louis T. Michener, January 18, 1889, Louis T. Michener Papers, Library of Congress; Platt, *Autobiography*, 206-210.

¹³ Gibbons, *Wanamaker*, I, 263, 336.

¹⁴ Benjamin Harrison to Wharton Barker, February 5 and 12, 1889, copies in the Harrison Papers.

Hotel, and the Senator, accompanied by Frank W. Leach, his secretary, arrived as soon as possible.¹⁵ The President-elect reported that Schurz was protesting Wanamaker's inclusion in the cabinet, because he had made a deal with railroad promoter Henry Villard. Reputedly Villard had been promised, in the presence of New York banker Jesse Seligman, that his railroad empire would not be antagonized by the Harrison Administration if he contributed generously to the campaign. Harrison insisted to Quay that he receive a denial of the charge from Wanamaker, corroborated by Seligman, or he would not appoint him to the cabinet.

When Quay returned to Leach who had waited in the carriage, "His face seemed ashen in the gaslight, and his lips trembled as he spoke." This was one of the few times in his life that he was visibly angry and excited. He began by blurting out, "Harrison is going to cheat us," but he quickly regained his composure and proceeded to map his strategy to carry out Harrison's dictum before the inauguration at noon the following day. Leach was sent to Philadelphia on the midnight train to brief Wanamaker and bring him back to the capital; the senator's son, Richard, was commissioned to locate Seligman who luckily had come to Washington for the inauguration. Both fulfilled their assignments, and the overnight drama was hastily brought to a climax.¹⁶

At 11:00 a.m., an hour before the swearing-in ceremony, Quay assembled all of the principals of this frantic interlude at his K Street residence. Harrison, Wanamaker, Seligman, and members of the Republican Executive Committee were all there. Wanamaker declared that the charge was totally without foundation, and in supporting his statement, Seligman confessed that he "always had had a very poor opinion of Carl Schurz's veracity and that Henry Villard was worse than Schurz." Harrison was satisfied, but with the Executive Committee still present he addressed himself to his host and said, "I want to have a chat of about 15 minutes with you and then, if you feel as you do now, I will appoint Mr. Wanamaker." When the others had retired, he continued:

¹⁵ Leach, "Twenty Years with Quay," July 3, 1904 (preliminary article).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*; Frank W. Leach to Albert T. Volwiler, July 20, 1938, copy in Box 2, Quay Family Papers.

Senator Quay, I will appoint Mr. Wanamaker if you insist upon it, but you are making the political mistake of your life. It will be a great mistake for you to have anyone from Pennsylvania between me and you, and I will not appoint him unless you insist upon it.

Quay promptly uttered the words that he lived to regret: "I am willing to take that chance." At least on this occasion Harrison proved to be more politically astute than the boss.¹⁷

The problem of appointments continued to plague the Harrison-Quay relationship long after the inauguration. The President's personality and lack of understanding concerning the role of a national chairman, complicated by Quay's own political ambition, kept the party leadership in turmoil. In defense of the President, it should be noted that Quay and the other bosses analyzed the appointment strategy strictly from the vantage point of the party, but in the face of their combined opposition, Harrison was attempting to raise the selection of office holders to a higher plane, to scan a broader political horizon, and to act as a President responsible to the total nation. Blinded by patronage snares, Quay and his followers disagreed thoroughly. They wanted Harrison's role as elected head of the government subordinated to his role as titular head of the party, but he was determined that the priorities should be reversed.

A fundamental difference in philosophy between Quay and Harrison cannot be denied, but it was further accentuated by misunderstanding. The President was never able to comprehend Quay's role as national chairman. During the campaign Quay had issued orders to the individual state chairmen, and they complied to the best of their abilities. They had served him, and when the subject of patronage came to the forefront, they expected him to serve them. This was particularly true of chairmen from states that did not have potent Republican organizations, such as those in the South. He was their contact, and they made their requests known to him. At times with comment and at times without, Quay forwarded proposals for appointments to the President who believed that to comply was to reward Quay personally.

¹⁷ Leach, "Twenty Years with Quay," July 3, 1904 (preliminary article); Richard R. Quay, I, to Isaac Pennypacker, March 9, 1927, copy in MSQ Papers.

When Harrison became completely obdurate, Quay had the patronage requests accompanied by endorsements to emphasize that they were not his alone. One request from Mississippi was sponsored by a host of the party's luminaries; McKinley, Hoar, Sherman, New, Dudley, and others all urged the President to consider the individual carefully. Another from Pennsylvania was signed by both Quay and Cameron, the state's other senator, along with a note to the effect that the state's total delegation was willing to support the request. Through such means, Quay hoped to demonstrate to the President that he operated from a position of power and would use political "muscle" if necessary, but Harrison could not be persuaded to cooperate.¹⁸

When Quay tried to discourage an office seeker by telling him that he did not believe that the President would consent to his appointment, the man was mystified. He could not conceive that the President would not be happy to comply with a request endorsed by the national chairman and asked: "Doesn't he know that you elected him?" Shaking his head, Quay replied matter-of-factly: "No, Benny thinks God did it." When Harrison questioned the integrity of another of Quay's designees for appointment and then formally rejected him, Pennsylvania's junior senator concluded: "They are now so damned pious over at the White House that they even open oysters with a prayer."¹⁹

Totally unsympathetic to the spoils element in government, Harrison refused to admit, or submit, to certain practical realities. When convenient to his purposes, he ignored his debt to the politicians, denied their role in his election, and occasionally, as stated earlier, depicted himself as the chosen instrument of the Almighty. To the members of the National Committee he became a colossal ingrate. He once told James N. Huston, chairman of the Republican Committee in his home state of Indiana, that "it was the Lord that made that nomination and caused that election." Doubting that the Lord had outmaneuvered Gresham, Blaine, Allison, and Sherman at the Chicago convention or had solicited huge campaign sums from business leaders, Huston bluntly declared: "Well, Mr. President, in future campaigns

¹⁸ Joseph R. Dillon to Matthew S. Quay, December 5, 1888; Matthew S. Quay to Benjamin Harrison, March 11 and 18, May 9, and June 5, 1889, all in Harrison Papers.

¹⁹ Richard R. Quay, II, to James A. Kehl, August 3, 1959, in possession of the author.

Republican workers had better sit down at home and let the Lord carry on the fight.”²⁰ This technique of attributing success to the Almighty nevertheless served the President well. Since he wanted to keep the politicians at arm’s length, it was an ingenious device for doing so.

After Harrison had been in office about one year and was thoroughly frustrated by Quay’s tactics, he yearned for his resignation as national chairman. According to Walter Wellman, Washington correspondent for the *Chicago Times-Herald*, the President summoned James S. Clarkson, Quay’s first assistant on the Republican National Committee, to the White House and calmly asked, “On a motion to depose Quay as chairman, how many members of the committee do you think will vote yea?” Clarkson made the committee’s position painfully clear when he said, “Mr. President, Senator Quay has for a long time wished to resign the chairmanship, and if such a motion were put in committee, he might cast his vote in favor of it. He is the only man that would. Between you, the President of the nation and the official head of our party, and Senator Quay, the committee to a man will stand by Quay. . . .”²¹

Quay and Harrison also clashed over the legislative program of the 51st Congress which convened in December, 1889. Party leaders were agreed that priority should be given to two topics: an upward revision of the tariff and a new Federal Elections Bill. The latter was intended to protect the constitutional right of blacks to vote and to have their votes counted. Designed to give federal circuit courts, rather than governors and state election boards, authority over congressional election procedures and returns, the Elections Bill was, in theory, applicable to all congressional districts in the nation, but in reality was aimed at the South alone. Its endorsers described it as a reaffirmation of the Fifteenth Amendment and a reassertion of the principles of national citizenship. To its opponents, the bill was a thinly-veiled attempt to undermine Bourbon control, to re-impose reconstruction, and to re-establish carpetbag rule in the South, which, in turn, would upset the peace, prosperity, and industrial growth of the nation.

President Harrison considered the passage of the Elections

²⁰ *Chicago Herald*, October 29, 1889, PC, III, 1.

²¹ *Dubuque Times*, September 7, 1895, PC, LIII, 245.

Bill as the primary goal of his administration. It was sponsored in the Senate by George Frisbee Hoar, chairman of the Committee on Privileges and Elections. He had illustrious support from Senators Spooner, Allison, Sherman, Orville Platt, Edmunds, Frye, and Hawley. In the House sponsorship was given by Henry Cabot Lodge and Thomas B. Reed. Speaking in Pittsburgh at the observance of Grant's birthday in 1890, Reed declared that the Elections Bill would pass the Senate ten days after it was introduced for discussion. Seated at the speaker's table, Quay shook his head negatively at this pronouncement, and time proved how correct his evaluation really was.²²

Quay was not fundamentally concerned with the Elections Bill, but with the legislative progress of the tariff measure sponsored by William McKinley. He had encouraged the industrial interests with numerous promises during the '88 campaign, and if he hoped to conduct future "fat fries" at the expense of that element, he had to fulfill the commitments which were outstanding. Thomas Dolan, president of the Philadelphia Manufacturers Club which had contributed most generously on the assumption that higher rates would accompany a Republican victory, had no intention of permitting him to forget. He wrote to Quay, reminded him of their understanding, and predicted that foreign imports would flood the American market if the McKinley Tariff were not enacted at once.²³ Quay recognized that his own prestige also rested on the success of this measure because enactment of the McKinley Tariff was essential to the development of his philosophy of politics. This philosophy held that the task of politicians was to take money from the few and votes from the many under the pretext of protecting one from the other.

Quay anticipated the tangle into which the Senate could be thrown by the Elections Bill and recognized that it would imperil all legislative action. Since the South vehemently opposed this measure, he knew that he would have to negotiate a set of guidelines for the conduct of legislative business in the remainder of the session or face a Democratic filibuster because the Elections Bill was ahead of the Tariff on the Senate docket. He talked

²² *Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette*, April 28, 1890.

²³ Stanley Hirshson, *Farewell to the Bloody Shirt: Northern Republicans & the Southern Negro, 1877-1893* (Bloomington, 1962), 227.

privately with Democratic leaders who were willing to agree on higher tariff rates if assured that the Elections Bill would be put aside. He then presented a resolution to the Republican caucus which enumerated the specific topics to be discussed during the remainder of the session.

With the tariff heading the list and the Elections Bill conspicuously absent, Hoar and his colleagues were furious. Hoar ranted at the senators and declared that, as a party, Republicans were committed to election purity, as well as protection. He wanted a floor fight on the Elections Bill before surrendering. Quay knew that certain Senate Republicans strongly opposed this legislation, but did not want to register their opposition in a formal vote because there was considerable sentiment for it among their constituents. With this knowledge Quay was able to carry a majority of the caucus with him, shove aside the President's "pet" bill, and clear the way for the passage of the McKinley tariff.²⁴

While Quay had been busy sidetracking Harrison's Elections Bill and embarrassing the President politically, others were yelping at his heels. This clamor came largely from his home state of Pennsylvania, partly from machine politicians like Chris Magee of Pittsburgh, but primarily from reform Republicans headed by Wharton Barker and Henry C. Lea of Philadelphia. Lea had just completed his three-volume *Inquisition in the Middle Ages* and was anxious to start one of his own within the Republican Party. Through the secret efforts of these Pennsylvania elements, a reporter for the *New York World* published several articles analyzing Quay's career before he had become a United States senator and chairman of the Republican National Committee. These articles accused him of numerous counts of bribery and embezzlement, as well as scandalous and cowardly conduct.²⁵

Because of Quay's prominence, the *World's* articles were reprinted and editorialized in newspapers across the country. There was a clamor for a denial or for a refutation, but Quay refused comment. Because of the gravity of the charges, most

²⁴ *Congressional Record*, 51 Cong., 1 Sess., XXI, Pt. 9, 8586; George F. Hoar, *Autobiography of Seventy Years* (New York, 1903), II, 156; "How Quay's Clever Move Saved the McKinley Bill," a political pamphlet in Quay Family Papers.

²⁵ "Statement of Wm. Shaw Bowen made June 2, 1890," 9-10, MSQ Papers.

newspapers, including those that were sympathetic, were demanding that he either speak or get out. When Quay announced that he would answer his critics, a lieutenant asked what he intended to say. He responded: "Well, I'll begin by calling them God damned liars, but after that I may have to become insulting." Personally Quay was in a dilemma; if he resigned as National Chairman, he would be politically disgraced; if he remained the Republican Party would be disgraced. Not pleased with either alternative, but supported by the party's Executive Committee, he went fishing and waited for the political climate to change.

Not wanting to surrender to the demands of the newspapers by resigning, Quay tried first to bluff Harrison into coming to his defense. He asked the President for his candid opinion concerning the pressure that he should resign from the party leadership. Believing that Quay did not truly want his answer, Harrison questioned him a second time, and the senator replied in the affirmative. Then with a smile, Harrison said, "I believe that it would be for the best interests of the party if you would resign the chairmanship of the Committee."²⁶ The senator had bluffed, and the President called him; resignation under favorable circumstances was the only remaining alternative. In the late summer of 1891, the circumstances were auspicious. On that occasion a reporter asked him to reminisce a bit about incidents in his long career. To this request he retorted, "So you want to print my obituary, do you? Well, I am not ready to have it written just yet," and at once moved to prove his point.²⁷

Primarily in league with Tom Platt and Jim Clarkson, Quay turned directly, but unsuccessfully to the task of preventing Harrison's re-nomination in 1892. Thoroughly dissatisfied with the President's conduct, this group, now termed the Grievance Committee by the Harrison faction, was anxious to undermine his support and demonstrate their own power. Their solution to achieve this goal was a Blaine boom, a simple device that required little imagination. There had been national movements by rank and file Republicans in behalf of the Maine statesman

²⁶ *St. Louis Republic*, April 20, 1892, PC, XLIII, 180.

²⁷ *Express* (Buffalo), July 30, 1891, and *Chicago News*, July 30, 1891, PC, XXVIII, 166 and 209.

in each of the four preceding presidential campaigns. This dormant legion, known to observers and antagonists alike as Blainiacs, could be easily awakened for another campaign.²⁸

Particularly in Pennsylvania, the cradle of previous Blaine crusades, the name was still magnetic. A Blaine endorsement by the state convention then was considered the most dramatic way to snub the President and tell the nation at large that the most powerful Republican state of the Union did not favor his renomination. As a result Quay maneuvered the Republicans of the Keystone State to declare their preference for Blaine over Harrison almost a year before the national convention met. The state resolution stopped short of formal endorsement, but was clearly an embarrassment to the President.

Anxious to pull the party factions together, John Wanamaker and several cohorts called on Harrison and urged him to come to terms with Quay so that his re-nomination might move forward behind a solid Pennsylvania delegation. According to newspaper reports, the President replied: "The less you have to do with Mr. Quay, the better it will be for yourself. He is not a fit man to associate with."²⁹ Although the wording was not authenticated, it was reported widely in the press and served more to inflame than to restrain.

The Grievance Committee meanwhile held several secret sessions in both New York and Washington during May, 1892, in an effort to map a successful course of action. At one of these stop-Harrison conferences in Washington, the Pennsylvania senators listened attentively as Reed, Platt, and others denounced the President. During a lull Quay said to Cameron, "Senator, I'm afraid that if we nominated Harrison, we couldn't elect him." "Humph!" grunted Cameron. "My only fear is if he's nominated, he will be elected."³⁰

Not only does this exchange dramatize party frustration, but it also subtly expresses two fundamentally different evaluations of Republican power in the spring of 1892. Cameron apparently considered victory in the general election to be a foregone conclusion while Quay was anxious to select a candidate, other

²⁸ "Republican Tactics in Pennsylvania," *The Nation*, LIII (August 1891), 154-155.

²⁹ *Evening Post* (New York), April 11, 1892, PC, XLII, 282; *Brooklyn Citizen*, May 30, 1892, PC, XLVII, 140.

³⁰ *Evening Post* (Louisville), May 9, 1892, PC, XLIV, 267.

than Harrison, who would lift the party to a competitive basis, because he regarded the President as a campaign liability. The latter's appraisal was certainly more realistic; he recognized that any other candidate could have squelched party differences and enhanced the chances for victory in November.

Blinded by their hatred of Harrison or so engrossed in their strategy to defeat his renomination, the Grievance Committee failed to pursue an answer to the most fundamental question: Did the President intend to seek a second term? Their whole campaign was based on the false assumption that he was eager to run again. This failure to ascertain the facts was primarily Quay's and was probably the most costly blunder of his career. If the President were not in contention, Quay could probably have named the candidate and have approached the campaign of 1892 with a united party behind him.

When the pressure from "Quay and Company" became defiant, Harrison concluded that he must either become a candidate or "forever wear the name of a political coward." "No Harrison," he said, "has ever retreated in the presence of a foe without giving battle, so I have determined to stand and fight."³¹ Harrison ultimately won his battle for the nomination, but the discord spread along the way caused the Republicans to lose the election. Throughout the 1889-92 period the Grievance Committee had contended that their organization and strategy had been responsible for placing Harrison in the White House. The President, on the other hand, had steadfastly ignored this assumption and at times attributed his success to Divine guidance. His defeat in 1892 did little to resolve the issue, but it did demonstrate that the Committee wouldn't help and God didn't.

³¹ Louis T. Michener, "Harrison Prior to the Convention of 1892," a recollection in the Louis T. Michener Papers, 2; Henry L. Stoddard, *As I Knew Them: Presidents and Politics from Grant to Coolidge* (New York, 1927), 179-180.