



M. S. Quay

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MATTHEW STANLEY QUAY¹

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SEPTEMBER 30, 1933, marked the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Matthew Stanley Quay, the most colorful political leader in Pennsylvania's history. For almost a half-century he took an active part in state and national politics. And during the two decades of the eighteen eighties and eighteen nineties every Republican candidate for the presidency of the United States eagerly sought his counsel. No man in all political history ever excelled him as a leader, a strategist, or an organizer.

Quay was born September 30, 1833, at Dillsburg, York County, Pennsylvania. His father, the Reverend A. B. Quay, was at that time serving two churches in the Presbytery of Carlisle. The boy was given the name of his mother's foster father and life-long friend, General Matthew Stanley.

In 1840 the Quay family migrated to western Pennsylvania, settling for a time in Pittsburgh. Later they moved to Indiana, Pennsylvania, where they resided until 1851. In the latter year they moved to Beaver. That beautiful and cultured little town, down on the Ohio River, continued as the home of the Reverend A. B. Quay until his

¹ Read at a meeting of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania on October 24, 1933. Dr. Oliver, who is head of the department of history in the University of Pittsburgh, is writing a comprehensive biography of Senator Quay. *Ed.*

death. Also it was the permanent legal home of Matthew Stanley Quay, with the exception of one brief period when he maintained his residence in Philadelphia.

As a lad Quay received more than an average education. His father, an educated clergyman and a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary, naturally interested himself in his son's training. The boy soon developed an interest in the classics and in good literature. He graduated from Jefferson College at Canonsburg in 1850. He then took up the study of law with the firm of Penny and Sterrett, one of the leading law firms of Pittsburgh of that day. One of the members of the firm, James P. Sterrett, later became chief justice of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court.

After spending a few years in the law offices of Penny and Sterrett, young Quay was seized with the spirit of adventure. He decided to travel, and spent two years in the southern states of Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas. He taught school, gave lectures on astronomy, and acquired valuable experience. He then returned to his home in Beaver and continued his legal studies with the distinguished Richard P. Roberts, who afterwards became commander of the 140th Pennsylvania Volunteers and who fell at Gettysburg, July 2, 1863.

Quay was admitted to the Beaver County bar in 1854, when he was twenty-one years old. But the lure of politics soon seized him. In 1855, the year after his admission to the bar, he received a political appointment—that of prothonotary of Beaver County. This appointment marked the beginning of his long political career, a career that was to continue almost uninterrupted for the next half-century, or until his death in 1904. He was elected by the voters of his county to the office of prothonotary for a full three-year term in 1856, and was re-elected for another three-year term in 1859.

Then came the Civil War, which brought the young lawyer-politician new duties, new demands, and new opportunities. He was one of the first from his county to offer his services. He was commissioned a first lieutenant in Company F, Thirty-ninth Regiment, known as the Tenth Reserve, on June 29, 1861. Andrew Gregg Curtin was then the war governor of Pennsylvania. Quay had been his campaign manager in Beaver County and, because of his political skill in turning in

a huge majority for Curtin, had won the governor's admiration and confidence. As a result, Governor Curtin called Quay to Harrisburg and appointed him assistant commissary general of Pennsylvania. On the shoulders of this young lieutenant colonel, for such became his rank, fell one of the biggest jobs of the state. But he proved that he was equal to the task. His energy, his capacity for organization, his attention to details, soon won for him the acclaim of both state and national military authorities. When, a little later, it became necessary to transfer the duties of the commissary department to Washington, Governor Curtin appointed him his private secretary.

But Quay had had enough of "swivel-chair" jobs. He wanted to see active service. He asked for a commission, and in August, 1862, he was commissioned colonel of the 134th Pennsylvania Volunteers. With his regiment, he was ordered at once to Washington and thence to Antietam, where he was stricken with typhoid fever. After several weeks he partially recovered his health and asked to be returned to his line of duty. He was, however, so reduced by disease that he was urged to ask for his discharge. This was granted him on December 7, 1862. But the day following, before he had left camp, he learned that a battle was soon to be fought at Fredericksburg, and he at once asked that his discharge be canceled. It had, however, already been accepted. Nevertheless the young *ex-colonel* decided to enter the battle, which, it will be remembered, was fought on December 13, 1862. Although greatly weakened in health, he demanded that General E. B. Tyler accept him as a volunteer aide. Before the battle the chief surgeon tried to persuade him to remain in bed, and declared that he would die like a fool. Quay's reply was, "I'd rather die like a fool than live like a coward." He entered the battle, rendered meritorious services, and was later awarded the congressional medal of honor.

Following Quay's discharge, which occurred a few months later, Governor Curtin appointed him as his military state agent in Washington. When the new office of military secretary was created, Quay was appointed to fill it and in addition he was asked to fill the important post of superintendent of transportation and telegraphs. In all of these tasks he proved himself a man of action and demonstrated his ability as a competent organizer. In later life, particularly when serv-

ing in the United States Senate, he never forgot the old soldiers, veterans of the Civil War. Many, many stories could be told, if time permitted, of his deeds of kindness to his comrades in arms.

But it is of his political career that I wish to speak further. Note, hurriedly, the offices he held. In 1864 he was chosen a member of the Pennsylvania legislature. He was reelected in 1865 and again in 1866. He soon rose to the chairmanship of the committee on ways and means. In 1867 he was a candidate for speaker of the House, but was defeated by the late John P. Glass of Allegheny County. Quay retired temporarily from political life at the close of the session in 1867. He returned to Beaver, where, two years later, he undertook the rôle of a journalist and started a weekly newspaper, the *Radical*.

In 1872 he was back in the political harness. He was largely responsible for bringing about the election of John T. Hartranft as governor, and in return for his services he was appointed secretary of the commonwealth. He held this office under three governors. In 1885 he was elected state treasurer by a landslide majority of over forty thousand votes. It was while he was serving in this position that he was elected, by an almost unanimous vote, to the United States Senate, in January, 1887. By this time Quay had become the undisputed political leader of Pennsylvania. More than that, he was rapidly becoming one of the recognized leaders of the Republican party throughout the nation.

Following the Republican national convention of 1888 and the nomination of Benjamin Harrison for the presidency, the leaders of the Republican party realized that they must pick an experienced and an outstanding commander-in-chief to lead the fight against the strongly entrenched Democratic party. No ordinary politician would do. He must be a leader in every sense of the word. He must be a master of men. He must know the science of politics. He must know the weakness of the enemy as well as their strength.

In seeking for such a leader, the Republicans turned to the new senator-elect from Pennsylvania, Matthew Stanley Quay. He was designated as chairman of the national Republican committee. His appointment to this position is all the more remarkable because it was well known that Quay was not an original Harrison man. In the na-

tional convention he had done everything in his power to nominate John Sherman of Ohio. Therefore, when the national committee, upon the suggestion of Harrison, asked Quay to become chairman, it was an acknowledgment of Quay's masterful leadership. The appointment came entirely without his seeking and without his previous knowledge.

Every student of political history knows the results of that memorable campaign of 1888. From the moment Quay took charge he had the Democrats on the defensive. His master stroke was that of sending his agents into New York City, some weeks in advance of the election, ostensibly to compile a city directory. But this so-called city directory turned out to be a registration of all qualified voters in that metropolis, whose majorities had heretofore been controlled body and soul by Tammany. And when a few days before the election Quay published a statement that his organization had the name, address, and business occupation of every qualified voter in New York City and that any attempt on the part of opposition leaders to stuff the ballot boxes with fictitious names would be followed by indictments and prosecutions, pandemonium reigned within the ranks of the Tammany forces.

The results of the voting proved that Quay had guessed right. He carried New York State by a plurality of thirteen thousand, and with New York's vote in the electoral college, Harrison's victory was assured. Quay was now the acknowledged political strategist of the nation. Senator Foraker of Ohio describes this achievement of Quay's in routing the Tammany organization as the master political stroke of all history.

Quay then returned to his seat in the United States Senate. In many respects his record here was unique. It was different from that of any other member of that deliberative body. He had his own ideas as to what a senator's duties should be and his plans and methods of achieving what he desired were distinctly his own.

For example, Quay did not believe in long-winded, senseless debates. The *Congressional Record* shows that with one exception he never made a speech of more than one column in length. He insisted that ninety-nine per cent of the speeches made in the Senate never won a vote or changed a senator's point of view. When he wanted one of

his own pet measures passed he would go to his colleagues, sit down with them, explain the measure in detail, and then ask them to vote for it. He kept a memorandum of those who were in favor of his measures and those who said they could not support him. If he had the promise of a majority, he would call up his bill for passage, but if he lacked a majority, he would drop all further consideration of his measure. In this manner he knew in advance what the outcome would be, a knowledge that enabled him to arrange his affairs so that he could absent himself from the Senate if he so desired. And the *Congressional Record* shows that he was absent probably more than any other member of the Senate. But it does not mean that he was inactive. The *Record* reveals that he was as effective as any of the senators in securing legislation and that he presented more petitions and brought about the passage of more resolutions than did any of his colleagues. But the point to be remembered is this: he saw no reason for entering into long, drawn-out debates, fruitless discussions, and endless filibustering. Would that more senators might take a tip from him!

Of the many services that Senator Quay rendered in the United States Senate, I shall mention only two—two that are to me outstanding. The first was his stand on the question of the protective tariff. Quay might rightfully be called Pennsylvania's greatest friend of protection. When he entered the Senate in 1887 the famous Mills Bill, championed by President Cleveland and the Democratic party, was before Congress. The aim of that bill was to reduce all tariff schedules to a minimum. In fact the Democrats were accused of trying to bring about absolute free trade. Quay took up the challenge at once. He had made a detailed study of schedules and had collected a mass of information about the Pennsylvania industries that were directly affected. And he knew more about the details of the proposed tariff and about its influence upon our state's industrial history than any other man on the floor of the Senate. He became an authority on the tariff. In my opinion, he even surpassed McKinley, author of the famous bill that bears his name.

Quay went into the Senate with the determination to keep a high protective tariff upon all the major industries of Pennsylvania. This

objective he never lost sight of. Year after year he fought for it, and in that famous fight of 1894, in which he succeeded in defeating the Wilson Bill, he declared that he had rendered his state the greatest service of his career.

The second outstanding accomplishment of Quay's senatorial career was the defeat of the Force Bill. This bill, it will be recalled, was championed by his own party, sponsored chiefly by Speaker Thomas B. Reed of the House and Senator Hoar of Massachusetts. The object of the bill was to permit the federal government to supervise congressional elections in any district, upon petition of a certain percentage of the qualified voters, where it was feared that a fair election could not otherwise be held. The bill was aimed directly at the South. By this bill it was the plan to send government officials into those congressional districts throughout the South where the negro population outnumbered the white and, with federal protection, to insist that all of the negroes go to the polls and elect Republican candidates to Congress. The wording of the bill was not put quite so bluntly, but that was its real purpose. Speaker Thomas B. Reed had railroaded the bill through the House in the spring of 1890 and rushed it over to the Senate, where he expected its immediate passage. He had declared that "when this Bill passes, the Republican party can always count on anywhere from thirty-five to forty Republican Congressmen in the Southern states, because," said he, "there are at least that many districts where the negro outnumbers the whites."

Speaker Reed came out here to Pittsburgh in April, 1890, to address the Americas Club, on the occasion of General Grant's birthday anniversary. The Force Bill was then pending in the Senate, and Reed took occasion to assure his audience that the bill would pass within ten days. But he had not reckoned with Senator Quay, who was sitting at the speakers' table when he made his declaration. And the newspaper accounts state that Quay quietly shook his head negatively, following Reed's announcement. Quay had already made up his mind to oppose the bill. Such a stand required courage and political independence of the highest order. The bill had already received the support of all the old party leaders, it had already passed the House, and President Harrison

had personally asked for favorable action upon it in the Senate. Hence he would be a brave man within the ranks of the Republican party who would lift his voice against such a measure.

But Quay decided to fight the bill. He knew the South; he knew that if that bill passed, its passage would produce a repetition of the reconstruction-carpetbagger days and that it might, in fact, lead to a second civil war. He therefore decided to prevent the bill from ever coming up for a roll call, and during the months of April, May, June, July, and August, he succeeded. Then in that memorable party caucus of August 17, 1890, when the Force Bill and the McKinley Tariff Bill hung in the balance, depending upon the majority of one vote, Quay succeeded in indefinitely postponing the Force Bill. The South never forgot Senator Quay's services in this connection, and students of American political history believe that he rendered a service second to that of no other man in preventing another possible civil war.

Permit me to mention one more of Quay's many interests while in the United States Senate. I refer to his interest in the North American Indians. I believe it to be a fact that Quay was the truest friend the Indian ever had. There is a story in his family that one of his ancestors on his maternal side was nursed during infancy by an Indian squaw. Quay was always proud of that story; he never forgot it. And when he entered the United States Senate, he asked for and received an appointment to the committee on Indian affairs. And, as already stated, no man ever took a more sincere interest in the Indian and his problems than did Senator Quay. Every Indian delegation that visited Washington during his term in the Senate found in him a true friend. When Chief Joseph and his party of the Nez Percé Indians visited the capital and found that they had no money with which to buy return tickets home, Senator Quay took them to the president and made arrangements for paying their entire return transportation. On his frequent visits to Florida the Seminole Indians learned to love him. Many are the stories of individual Indians who received free hospital care from the generous purse of the Pennsylvania senator.

Senator Clark of Wyoming gives us a vivid story, much too long to repeat in all its details here. The story describes a visit upon which he accompanied Senator Quay out into the Indian Territory, now Okla-

homa, where they visited the little town of Dewey. The object of the journey was to attend one of the annual worships of the Delawares, when they held communion with the Great Spirit and when Manitou returned to visit the Indians as a real being. On this occasion Senator Quay was elected grand chief of the Delawares. Numerous other stories, too many to recite here, have come to my attention in making the study of this real friend of the American Indian.

Senator Quay took a deep interest in many more questions in addition to those I have just mentioned. His stand on the immigration question, on the Spanish-American War, on the Chinese question, on the proposed Nicaraguan Canal, on the beautifying of the nation's capital, on the free-silver movement of '96, on the marking of battlefields and historical points of interest, on pensions, on national prohibition and temperance, and on scores of other pending issues are most interesting, but a discussion of them would take me far beyond the limits of this paper.

It may be of timely interest to say here that it was Senator Quay who was responsible for having the Chicago World's Fair of 1893 close its gates on Sundays. The story of that one incident makes an interesting chapter in his first term in the Senate.

No paper, however sketchy, relating to Senator Quay's life, would be complete without some reference to the bitter opposition that developed against him, both within his own state and in the nation at large. I doubt if there is in all our political history any individual who has been so bitterly criticized, caricatured, maligned, and satirized, as Matthew Stanley Quay. He was accused of almost every crime that comes within the vocabulary of the politicians' language. How, you may properly ask, can one explain away these charges? Again, I must plead lack of time in attempting a detailed answer for every charge. I can only suggest briefly a few of the more lengthy explanations that I am working upon.

First, let me say most candidly and openly that Quay was guilty—if you want to use that word—of accepting and using money in his political campaigns. But he differed from others in that he made no attempt to conceal or hide that fact. He was openly outspoken in declaring that it required money, lots of money, to win elections and that if individuals or corporations expected to profit by the outcome of a special election

they must contribute, and contribute dearly, to its success. There was nothing novel about this—the only new feature being that Quay came out and told the interested parties what they were expected to do. And if they made their contributions he considered it his duty to work for legislation that would be favorable to his clients' causes. Looked at from this point of view, one can readily see the connection between Quay's fight for a high protective tariff and liberal contributions from the Pennsylvania manufacturers.

Similar explanations can be given in dozens of other cases. Quay looked upon politics as a science and as a business. Issues upon which men could honestly differ he felt should be carefully, scientifically studied. Once arrived at his conclusions as to the merits of an issue, he turned to the business side of politics, and worked unceasingly—his enemies would say unscrupulously—for its enactment into law.

Finally, there is the question that keeps coming up again and again: "To what do you attribute his power as a political leader?" How was it possible for this man, small of stature, personally not very attractive, a man with a weak and feeble speaking voice—how was it possible for him to gain such a hold upon the political affairs of this commonwealth and of the nation at large? To this question I have given some years of study. No one answer will suffice. But if I can suggest a solution that would partly answer the question, it would be repeating what I have already said: Quay studied politics as a science. He knew men. He knew human nature. He knew in advance what the great mass of voters would probably think on every important issue. There is abundant evidence to support all of these statements.

For example, Quay knew that when a friend had asked him a favor, it would be only natural for that friend to respond when he was called upon. In 1860, when Andrew Gregg Curtin, then the nominee for the governorship of Pennsylvania, wrote a letter to this young Beaver County politician, asking his support, Quay laid that letter away. Many years later, when he, Quay, wanted to run for a state office, he hunted up the old letter, wrote on the back of it, "I am a candidate for the State Treasury. I will appreciate your support." He then inclosed it in another envelope and mailed it to former Governor Curtin. That was a master stroke. Many other incidents like this could be enumerated.

Another trait of Quay's leadership was keeping in close touch with a few selected leaders in every section of the state. He made it a point to pick out the prominent young political leaders in every voting precinct of every county in the state. He courted their friendship, he invited them to call upon him, he asked their advice, and whenever he could he always rendered them some personal service. When his opponents, therefore, invaded any section of the state and spoke against Quay, they were usually reminded of some personal favor that Mr. Quay had already rendered to one or two important individuals in that community. The result was that Quay could invariably count upon a successful leader in every section of the commonwealth.

Another trait that contributed to his leadership was loyalty. He was loyal to his friends and loyal to his party. When once he promised to do something his word was even better than a written pledge. He, in turn, expected his friends to follow him when they had given him their word.

Then, too, Quay was a great student of history. He knew, as did few of his colleagues, the detailed history of democracies and republics from the days of the Greeks down to the present. His private library was regarded, at the time of his death, as one of the finest private libraries in the country. In making this study of his life it has been my pleasure to work with much of the material he had collected, and I have been amazed at the number of works he accumulated, particularly works relating to history and government. He knew his library—every book on every shelf. One of his colleagues in speaking of Senator Quay said that he was the greatest student of history and the greatest linguist in the United States Senate during his career. This same colleague goes on to say that he had never had the pleasure of associating with any individual who had a richer or riper knowledge of the great masters of thought through all the ages than that possessed by Senator Quay. "If there was in my mind a fugitive couplet or verse, the author of which I could not recall, or if there was a saying of some great master thinker that I could not place, there were only two men in Washington to whom I could go for help. One was to Mr. Spofford, of the Congressional Library, and the other was Matthew Stanley Quay. Either of these men could tell me the author, the verse, and the paragraph and page on which I could find the quotation I wanted."

Lastly, Quay was a domestic man. He loved his home and family above everything else. His home might be pointed to as a model for American families. Undoubtedly much of the strength and fortitude that he exhibited in his contests with political giants of the time had its origin in the surroundings of his happy home. His loving wife and devoted children made that home a place of rest and recuperation. This security enabled him to meet each coming contest with renewed vigor of body and mind. Everyone who visited his home and saw him surrounded by his happy family was struck by the contrast between what he really was and what jealous rivalry had painted him to be. He was kind in disposition, a devoted husband, and an indulgent father. One of his colleagues remarked that he had never known a family where the relations and ties were stronger than in the home of Senator Quay. "But," he continued, "when you ascend from the family drawing room to his library, there you saw the man at his best. Here he was in his element. Surrounded by his books, he learned that wisdom and knowledge of history and that experience for which other men were in the habit of going to him when seeking advice. They learned to rely upon his judgment because he seldom ever erred."

Shortly after entering upon his third term in the United States Senate, Quay's health began to fail rapidly. He carried on, however, until the spring of 1904, when he realized that the end was near. He retired to his brother's beautiful country estate, at Morganza, Pennsylvania, for rest. Recovery seemed hopeless, and he asked to be taken back to his own home in Beaver. Here he died on May 28, 1904. His funeral was attended by the greatest outpouring of people that ever gathered in the Beaver Valley. It was attended by statesmen, generals, and business and professional men from all parts of the country. His remains lie buried in the Beaver Cemetery, in the Quay family lot. A simple inscription—*Implora Pacem* (I pray for Peace)—together with his name, is all that adorns his gravestone.