XIV

Mark Hanna vs. Tom Johnson

So MANY strong men sprang out of the Cleveland environment in the city's youthful years it's a pity somebody didn't think of analyzing the soil or testing the air. At the very least, there should have been a Senate investigation.

The situation, as the sunset of the nineteenth century came into view, was that a Clevelander named John D. Rockefeller was cornering most of the money in the world and another Clevelander named Marcus Alonzo Hanna was cornering most of the power in national politics.

But strangely enough, while either Rockefeller or Hanna was capable of shaking the capitals of Europe simply by lifting his little finger, neither one of them had as much influence with his fellow Clevelanders as a portly, curly-haired young man named Tom Loftin Johnson.

Some sticklers for formality among the political science writers of the day insisted on calling him Thomas L. Johnson, which was wrong. He was christened Tom and the name fitted him as no other name could.

Tom L. Johnson today shares the Public Square with Moses Cleaveland. His statue is in the centerpiece of the northwest quadrant of the Square, near the free speech rostrum—no accident of juxtaposition. He was a fierce defender of the public's right to speak out, and something of a free speaker himself.

Hanna and Johnson were born rivals. They competed in business, they competed in politics, and they competed for a place in history.

They were a pair of street railway executives whose political tracks took them to national glory, each by a different route.

They were opposites, but they were also similar. They were strong men, brilliant men, rich men—and they were poles apart in their philosophies of government. If you were a Clevelander, you took your place at the side of one or the other. You were either with Mark or you were with Tom. They left you no middle ground to stand on, nor any kind of a fence to straddle.

Mark Hanna was the Republican; Tom Johnson was the Democrat. Hanna was a prosperous businessman, a millionaire, who plunged into

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politics in his middle age and helped to shape the Republican Party according to his advanced concept of what a political organization should be.

In that time of industrialization, of new businesses and new fortunes, of growing monopolies and trusts, Hanna fought for laissez-faire government. It was his contention that capitalism would flourish best in an atmosphere free of government-imposed inhibitions, with prosperity benefiting everyone as the end result.

Hanna wanted a businesslike national administration and, by example, he encouraged businessmen to take an active part in politics and to play a forceful role in government. His own role was so active and so forceful that he became the archetype of the political boss, the kingmaker, the boss of bosses. He was the inspiration for the Homer Davenport cartoon of the political boss that since has become a journalistic cliché—the cartoon of the swollen, arrogant, plutocrat-politician with a large dollar sign on his vest, a cigar in his mouth, and a whiskey bottle gripped in his hand.

Johnson, like Hanna, was a businessman and a millionaire. He was, in fact, just the caliber of man that Mark Hanna wanted to see in politics except for some shocking deviations, including the fact that he was something of a political radical. Tom L. was a disciple of Henry George, the champion of the Single Tax, and he entertained strange advanced notions about the need for civic and political reform, social justice, the rights of the public, and even public ownership of utilities.

The clash between the two strong Clevelanders was inevitable. Over a period of twenty-five years they confronted each other in the lists, and every time they rode at each other the ground shook, the trees bent, and small tidal waves formed in Lake Erie.

New Lisbon, Ohio, a small town near Youngstown, was Mark Hanna's birthplace. He was the son of Dr. Leonard C. Hanna and Samantha Converse. His father, the descendant of Virginia Quakers, had been trained as a doctor, but never had practiced because of injuries suffered in mounting a horse. His mother, a schoolteacher, was a native of Vermont and had a sharply honed New England sense of propriety.

Dr. Hanna had entered the family's wholesale grocery business in New Lisbon, and his was said to be the most prosperous household in the town. But the Ohio Canal, connecting the Ohio River and Lake Erie, bypassed New Lisbon and it was almost a death blow to the community. The Hannas finally picked up their belongings and moved to Cleveland in 1852.

Young Mark attended Brownell School and then enrolled in Central High School at the same time that John and William Rockefeller began to attend classes there. The three of them became close friends, and they maintained that friendship through later life.

Mrs. Hanna prevailed on Mark to enroll at Western Reserve College, then in Hudson, Ohio, and he did—briefly. He related the story of how he finished college in four months, instead of the usual four years, when he addressed the college's seventy-fifth commencement exercise.

"I wanted to go to work. My mother said I should go to college. So I went. I was young, innocent, confiding. One day some of the sophomores induced me to help distribute copies of a burlesque program of the exercises of the junior class. I stood on the steps handing them to the audience as they passed in. The President of the college came along. He grasped me by the shoulder and asked, 'Young man, what are you doing?'

"I replied that I was distributing literature in the interests of education and morality.

"I quit college soon after that. The faculty seemed resigned to my absence. One day the [college] president met me on the street. I had on blue overalls and was hard at work. He looked at me with an expression that seemed to say, 'Well, I guess you have found your right place!' And I thought so, too. I liked work better than study. I have been hard at work ever since . . ."

Hanna's first job was working as a roustabout on the Merwin Street docks in the employ of Hanna, Garretson & Company, a wholesale grocery business and commission house owned by his father, his uncle, and a family friend, Hiram Garretson. He was paid twenty-five dollars a month. Close by, on the same Merwin Street, his old schoolmate, John Rockefeller, was working for Hewitt & Tuttle, another commission house. But Hanna quickly shucked the overalls to become a purser on a lake boat, then a solicitor of business for his father's company, a job that took him around the state.

Life was not all work. Mark attended a bazaar one night and met a very attractive girl, Charlotte Augusta Rhodes, with whom he fell in love. That was a romantic thing to do, of course, but there is no doubt that it created a new problem, namely: How to break the news to Papa Rhodes. Daniel P. Rhodes was a remarkable man in his own right. Besides being one of the most successful coal and iron merchants in Cleveland, he also was one of the city's leading Democrats. Young Mark, even then, was unmistakably a Republican, extremely active in the party and extremely outspoken on political subjects.

Rhodes' first sputtering reaction to the news of the romance was that he did not want any "damned" Republican in his family. There were some points in Hanna's favor, though, as Rhodes examined the suitor for his daughter's hand. He was direct, open, and candid—traits that Rhodes treasured—and his mother was from Vermont. Rhodes himself was from Vermont.

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http://site.ebrary.com/lib/clevelandstatedr/Doc?id=10440741&ppg=166

Rhodes took pride in his ability to measure men. He was a poker player of sorts and it helped to be able to judge his opponents.

After his scrutiny of young Hanna, Charlotte's father presumably found him acceptable because the couple was married September 27, 1864, in historic old St. John's Episcopal Church, which still stands at 2600 Church Avenue on the lower West Side. Hanna joined his father-in-law's company and his business genius quickly made him a standout. The company prospered, acquired shipping lines and railways for the movement of coal, iron ore, pig iron, and a variety of by-products, and its name eventually was changed from Rhodes & Company to M. A. Hanna & Company. It remains one of Cleveland's most formidable business empires to this day.

Success in business having arrived early, and with relative ease, it isn't surprising that Hanna's eyes were looking about for a sterner challenge and a more interesting way to employ his brilliance. He found it in politics when, in 1880, the Republican candidate for the Presidency was a fellow townsman, James A. Garfield. Hanna's contribution to Garfield's campaign was his organization of the Cleveland Business Men's Marching Club. His original idea for the club was to use it simply as a means of raising money for the campaign, but it became more than that. The businessmen who enlisted were willing to give their time and effort in Garfield's behalf, as well as their money. The idea spread to other cities, and Hanna's innovation became an interesting new political instrument.

The most important single result of that presidential campaign, however, was that it ensnared Hanna completely in the fascinating web of politics. He began to enlarge his circle of political acquaintances and to devote more of his time to the role of a student undertaking to master a fascinating new science. Among those whom he sought out was William McKinley, the congressman from Canton. He had reason to remember McKinley from a time several years previous when his company had had a strike. One of the Hanna workers was shot by the state militia and twenty-three of the strikers subsequently were indicted for violence and tried. Their lawyer was William McKinley, and he did a masterful job. Twenty-two of the strikers were acquitted; one was given a short jail sentence.

Hanna remembered the talented lawyer, now a United States Representative, and was even more deeply impressed when McKinley, chairman of the Ohio delegation to the 1888 Republican Convention, demonstrated the one trait that Hanna prized above all others: loyalty. The delegation was committed to Senator John Sherman of Ohio, who, by the fifth ballot, had been unable to pick up enough votes to win, and it was plain that his strength was diminishing. A delegate from Connecticut at that point nominated McKinley, who jumped to his feet and

refused the honor, reaffirming the delegation's support of Sherman's lost cause. Now Hanna was convinced that McKinley was presidential timber, and he began, systematically, to promote his personal candidate for the nation's highest office.

He decided that 1892, the next national election year, would not be a successful one for the Republican candidate, and he trained his sights on the election of 1896. He had overlooked a most important hurdle—the congressional election of 1890, in which McKinley was defeated in a major political upset.

Here Hanna showed his battlefield versatility. He immediately revised his plans, knowing that McKinley, to be a serious contender for the G.O.P. presidential nomination, had to be kept in the public eye. The solution was to get him elected governor of Ohio. He directed a masterful campaign, and McKinley won the office in 1891.

Another crisis arose in 1893, when McKinley determined to resign as governor because of a personal crisis. He had endorsed notes for a friend who went bankrupt in the financial panic that swept the country that year, making McKinley personally liable for debts totaling $130,000. Hanna, always the master money-raiser, called on the leading millionaire Republicans to rally around with ready cash and they did. The donors were said to include Andrew Carnegie, Charles Taft, Henry Frick, and Hanna himself.

Their investment was in McKinley's future prospects, and their judgment proved sound in 1896, when the statesman from Canton was elected President of the United States in a national election which was something of an anticlimax, following as it did the tumultuous Republican convention which nominated McKinley. The country was introduced to a new kind of political showmanship and candidate management by Mark Hanna. In boosting McKinley into the White House, Hanna overpowered the political opposition and the voters with an unbelievable barrage of publicity and propaganda.

William Jennings Bryan was the Democratic candidate, and Hanna saw to it that little boys all over the nation soon learned the lines to this singing jingle:

"McKinley drinks soda water,
Bryan drinks rum;
McKinley is a gentleman,
Bryan is a bum!"

In the words of Theodore Roosevelt, Hanna "advertised McKinley as if he were a patent medicine."

Hanna was the first of the high-pressure hucksters, the advance man for twentieth-century Madison Avenue to follow. He was responsible for

mailing about three hundred million pieces of McKinley literature to the people of the nation; about thirty million a week, including millions printed in a dozen different languages. He had McKinley's face on drinking mugs, walking sticks, sterling silver spoons, lapel buttons, posters, and badges. He coined the slogan, "The Full Dinner Pail," and, knowing that McKinley couldn't match the silver-and-gold oratory of Bryan, Hanna came up with one of the best gimmicks in the history of national politics—the "front porch" campaign. The porch of McKinley's house in Canton was the homely stage on which he made about twenty appearances a day, each time to a different crowd numbering in the thousands. Railroads cooperated with the G.O.P. in running low-fare excursions to Canton; fares so low, in fact, it was said that it was cheaper for a voter to go to Canton than it was for him to stay home.

With McKinley elected, Hanna attended to his own ambition. He rejected an invitation to become a member of the cabinet (Postmaster General). He regarded the honor of being a senator as second only to the Presidency. McKinley obligingly named Senator John Sherman of Ohio his Secretary of State, while Governor Asa Bushnell of Ohio completed the lightning double play by appointing Hanna to succeed Sherman.

Hanna liked his life as a senator even more than he had anticipated. He was more than a senator; he was, as one observer described him, McKinley's "political prime minister." But the appointment was only for a year's duration. In 1897, he had to win the Senate seat by going before the Ohio State Legislature and winning its approval. At that time, the state legislatures elected the United States senators.

Some experts, indeed, point to the wild Hanna campaign for senator that year as the rowel that pricked a nation's conscience and led directly to the adoption of popular election of U.S. senators shortly thereafter.

Hanna himself was unsure of his own vote-getting ability. He once had said to his attorney, James H. Dempsey: "Jim, I could no more be elected Senator than I could fly."

The Ohio legislature was evenly divided on Hanna's candidacy, and every vote counted. Wavering legislators were wined and dined and wooed by the Hanna side. Once they had proclaimed their fealty, they were guarded against the wiles and lures of the enemy camp; that is to say, they were made virtual prisoners. One solon, slightly soggy from booze, was snatched away from the Hanna embrace by the opposition, who drugged him and stashed him away in one of their own hideouts. The Hanna henchmen struck right back, rekidnaping the bewildered legislator, redrugging him, and re-establishing him as their prisoner.

It was a raw, open political battle for supremacy, and while the nation looked on at the spectacle aghast, Hanna fought with every

Condon, George E.. Cleveland : the best kept secret.
New York, NY, USA: Doubleday, 1967. p 169.
http://site.ebrary.com/lib/clevelandstatedr/Doc?id=10440741&ppg=169

weapon he owned. On the big day, January 11, 1898, he had his legislative supporters marched under guard through the streets to the majestic, domeless state capitol building, when he was duly elected United States senator.

Hanna's most significant defeat in national politics came after the death of McKinley's Vice President, Garret A. Hobart, who died in November 1899. Hanna was outmaneuvered by two rival political bosses, T. C. Platt of New York and Matt Quay of Pennsylvania, who saw to it that Theodore Roosevelt won the vice presidential nomination in 1900. Hanna disliked Roosevelt, whom he called "that damned cowboy," and he went out of his way to annoy the governor of New York by referring to him as "Teddy." Roosevelt, on the other hand, irritated Hanna by calling him "Old man."

The end of the glory road for Hanna came with the assassination of President McKinley on September 6, 1901 by a man named Leon Czolgosz, who turned a short-barreled .32-caliber Iver-Johnson revolver on the Chief Executive in the Temple of Music at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo.

Hanna rushed to McKinley's side as the President's life ebbed away. "William . . . William . . . Don't you know me?" he cried out. Hanna's grief was genuine. Even his critics granted his feeling for McKinley was close to reverence.

Ironically, the anarchist who had murdered the President called Cleveland his home. Czolgosz, the son of a Polish immigrant, was born in Detroit. The family had moved to Orange Township in Cuyahoga County, where Leon and his two brothers grew up on the farm. In 1880, the family moved to Cleveland, where Leon, a brooding type, took to studying anarchistic literature of the day and attending meetings of anarchistic followers. One such meeting was addressed by the leading anarchist spokesman, Emma Goldman, who declared that all governmental rulers should be exterminated.

"This lecture," Leon admitted later, "set me on fire with anarchistic ideas; I could but think I ought to do something heroic."

That "something heroic" he decided on turned out to be the murder of President McKinley.

As if to put the tragedy behind him with hard work, Hanna was the busiest man in Congress during its next session. He proved, further, to be as valuable an adviser to President Roosevelt as he had been to President McKinley. The new Chief Executive's opinion of Hanna shot steadily upward as did his fear of the Ohioan as a possible opponent for the Presidency at the next election. He described Hanna's qualities as "rugged, fearless, straightforwardness of character. No beating around the bush."

When Hanna hesitated to endorse Roosevelt for the nomination in

1903, Roosevelt challenged him to make his position clear, and the break came. Hanna continued his campaign for re-election to the Senate and won by an overwhelming vote. The experts predicted he would make a bid for the Presidency, but there was a perceptible sag in the old kingmaker's attitude. The sparkle seemed to have gone out of politics for him when McKinley was extinguished. He looked drawn and tired. In January 1904, shortly after he was sworn in to his new term of office, Mark Hanna took ill with typhoid and died.

Something else had happened in that dreary last third of 1901 to depress Mark Hanna; nothing so dreadful as the assassination of the President, nor as discouraging as the step-up of Roosevelt, but a political development that was, nonetheless, terribly annoying to him personally. It was the election of Tom L. Johnson as mayor of Cleveland.

Hanna saw Johnson's ascendancy as a menacing portent of things to come. Like most other conservatives of the day, he regarded Johnson as a dangerous radical whose philosophy threatened the security of the established system. He accused Tom L. of being the national leader of the Socialist party. At other times, he called him a "nihilist" and an "anarchist."

The plain fact was that Johnson had been a burr in Hanna's side for some twenty-two years, and his election as mayor of Cleveland was a galling climax of their running feud.

Hanna indisputably was the political mastermind of the nation, but even when people were saying that he was more powerful than the President, and joking about McKinley having to dance at the end of Hanna's string, the Cleveland Republican leader was unable to dominate his own city's political affairs. He was never able to control Tom Johnson. He could not even win an armistice from him.

Hanna found his strongest opponent right at home. Cleveland knew that Johnson was more than a match for Hanna, and so, in time, did the nation.

Johnson's dissatisfaction with the governmental and social order of things puzzled Hanna. From the standpoint of that pragmatist, conditions in the United States hardly could have been better than they were in the last glorious quarter of the nineteenth century when the interests of Big Business were able to bend the government to their will. Among those who had taken advantage of the opportunities opened by monopolistic practice was Tom Johnson himself.

Hanna could understand the discontent of the have-nots, but Johnson was one of the haves. He was as much a capitalist as was Hanna, and he owed the system the same kind of loyalty and service. His defection from the approved path of political and economic orthodoxy made him, in effect, a rogue millionaire.

Condon, George E.. Cleveland : the best kept secret.
New York, NY, USA: Doubleday, 1967. p 171.
http://site.ebrary.com/lib/clevelandstatedr/Doc?id=10440741&ppg=171

The first confrontation of the two giants in 1879 had set the competitive tone of their relationship during the twenty-five years that followed. It was a head-on conflict, with a street railway franchise in Cleveland as the prize.

They were unlikely opponents. Johnson was a plump, handsome boy of twenty-four years, gentle in manner and soft of voice. He was a newcomer to the city and a nonentity.

Hanna, on the other hand, was one of the city's leading citizens; a man who counted. It was apparent in his brusque manner, his direct way of speaking, his impatience with underlings.

"Some men must rule; the great mass of men must be ruled," Mark Hanna once said. "Some men must own; the great mass of men must work for those who own."

Johnson wanted to win a place in the tangled transit situation in Cleveland where altogether there were eight different street railway companies in operation. One of these, on the West Side, belonged to Mark Hanna, and his company competed for the same franchise that Johnson sought. Hanna's forces won, even though Johnson's offer was better. The award was predicated on a technicality in the fine type which gave preference to the bidder with an existing service.

Hanna had won the opening round, but Tom Johnson was a quick learner. This was merely the beginning of the fight. It was the kind of challenge he relished; one in which the odds were against him.

The odds had been heavy against Tom L. Johnson from the beginning. He was born in Blue Spring, Kentucky, near Georgetown, on July 18, 1854, the son of Albert W. Johnson, whose career as a cotton grower was ended by the Civil War.

The family began a nomadic existence that continued even after Colonel Johnson returned from the Confederate Army. Except for one year at a school in Evansville, Indiana, the boy had no formal education. In 1869, though, the family finally settled on a farm near Louisville, Kentucky, and Tom, fifteen, got a job in a rolling mill in the city.

That job lasted only a few months. Two relatives of the Johnson family by marriage, Bidermann and Alfred V. du Pont, had purchased the street railroad in Louisville and they gave Tom a job in the office.

The brothers du Pont were grandsons of Pierre Samuel du Pont, founder of the E. I. du Pont de Nemours Powder Company.

Tom Johnson's career with the du Pont railway in Louisville was sensational enough to make Horatio Alger twitch with disbelief. He began as the office boy and handyman at seven dollars a week. At the end of his first year, he was secretary of the company. Two years later, at age seventeen, he was superintendent of the railway. Along the way he also had invented the world's first coin fare box—a glass and metal

container that kept conductor and customers alike honest. He profited to the extent of close to thirty thousand dollars from the invention.

At age twenty, he married a distant cousin, Maggie J. Johnson, and two years later he became a full-fledged railway entrepreneur with the purchase of the majority of the stock of the Indianapolis street railway company from William H. English, who later was a candidate for the vice presidency of the United States.

He had approached English with the hope of selling him his fare boxes.

"I don't want to buy a fare box, young man," English said, "but I have a street railroad to sell."

Johnson bought. He financed the transaction with his profits from the invention and a loan from the du Ponts. The Indianapolis railway was a stumbling, deficit operation, and English proved to be troublesome, but the young executive overcame the problems and turned the system into a profitable enterprise.

His appetite whetted by this achievement, he looked around for another battlefield worthy of his talents and decided on Cleveland as his target. The defeat he suffered at the hands of Mark Hanna in his initial bid only made him more determined.

"I was only twenty-five," he wrote later, "and willing to learn."

He purchased the Pearl Street (West 25th Street) Line that ran along that West Side thoroughfare a distance of a few miles to a terminal point at the Market House at Pearl and Lorain streets, just a half-mile short of the Superior Viaduct and the municipally owned tracks on it which would carry a streetcar over the Cuyahoga Valley and into the downtown area.

The trouble was that the precious half-mile of track on Pearl Street between the end of Tom L.'s railway and the Superior Viaduct was owned by the Lorain Street and Woodland Avenue Railway. This was the company in which Hanna was a large stockholder. It was headed by a Captain Elias Simms. They would not give Johnson permission to use their tracks and thus enable him to provide uninterrupted, through service downtown to his customers.

Pending a solution of the problem, Johnson resorted to the use of a horse-drawn bus line to carry his passengers from the end of his line to the center of the city. Meanwhile, knowing that the Hanna-Simms franchise was coming up soon for renewal, he made their blocking of through service on his line a hot political issue. The City Council came under such severe civic scrutiny in the controversy that even though it was normally under Hanna's thumb, it refused to grant a renewal of the Hanna-Simms company's franchise except on condition that Johnson's streetcars be allowed the use of his rival's tracks.

That was Tom Johnson's first victory over Mark Hanna and it had

Condon, George E.. Cleveland : the best kept secret.
New York, NY, USA: Doubleday, 1967. p 173.
http://site.ebrary.com/lib/clevelandstatedr/Doc?id=10440741&ppg=173

important consequences. It provided him with a firm footing for future expansion in the Cleveland traction field. It gave him civic and political stature as the man who had beat the formidable Mark Hanna. And, as it turned out, it brought about a situation which led directly to still another victory—a quarrel between Captain Simms and Hanna. The partners fell out and Simms was ousted from his railway post.

Johnson, meanwhile, moved quickly toward expansion. He bought a second railway line, the Jennings Avenue Line, and followed with a bid in the City Council for the big prize—a franchise to construct lines on the East Side. If successful in this bid, he would be able to connect the East Side lines with his existing West Side railways and thus provide Cleveland, for the first time, with cross-city, through rail transportation for a single fare.

The concept captured the imagination of Clevelanders, but the odds again were against Johnson. Hanna's influence in the City Council and his calculated willingness "to spread the green" gave him the upper hand. It was a tug-of-war for votes. Johnson and Hanna attended every meeting of the council, directing their opposing maneuvers like a pair of field marshals. A vote was ordered and in the roll call two councilmen who always heretofore had voted in the Hanna interest suddenly shifted to the Johnson side. Their votes were decisive. Johnson won the precious franchise and another sensational victory over the great Mark Hanna.

The happy defection of the councilmen, it turned out, puzzled Johnson as much as it did Hanna—so much so that Tom, reasoning that Hanna's former associate, Simms, might be able to throw some light on the subject, went to the home of his former rival.

Simms came to the door in his shirt-sleeves, squirted some tobacco juice over the bannister, eyed Johnson for a long moment, and finally invited him inside.

Johnson quickly explained the purpose of his visit.

"You're a smart young feller, Johnson," Simms said. "Beat me, didn't ye?"

When Johnson stirred, Simms lifted his hand.

"Yes," he said, "ye beat me. Folks might say I ain't very smart. Everybody knows Hanna's smart, though. Takes more'n a fool to beat Hanna. If you beat Hanna, nobody'll say that any damn fool could beat Simms. Ye beat me; I want ye to beat Hanna."

The explanation of Hanna's defeat was that simple. Simms still retained enough influence with at least two city councilmen to strike back at his old partner and restore some of his shattered pride.

The significance of the Hanna-Johnson conflicts was not the disposition of the prized railway franchises, but the emergence of a strong

Condon, George E.. Cleveland : the best kept secret.
New York, NY, USA: Doubleday, 1967. p 174.
http://site.ebrary.com/lib/clevelandstatedr/Doc?id=10440741&ppg=174

man who could successfully do battle with the Republican leader—and on his home ground, at that.

In his autobiography, "My Story," Tom L. reveals that the significance of his successful opposition was not lost on Hanna.

". . . I have always thought," wrote Johnson, "that Mr. Hanna anticipated many of the possibilities of the great struggle which was to follow, for it was after my first victory over him in the matter of gaining the right to operate over his lines that he telegraphed me in Indianapolis proposing a partnership and a consolidation of our interests. I wired my refusal.

"When I met him the next time I was in Cleveland, Mr. Hanna asked me why I had declined his proposition, pointing out as advantages to such an arrangement *his* acquaintance and influence with bankers and *his* familiarity with the political end of the game and *my* knowledge of and experience in the street railroad business itself.

"My answer was that we were too much alike; that as associates it would be a question of time, and a short time only, until one of us would 'crowd the other clear off the bench'; that we would make good opponents, not good partners."

He added: "I have never had any occasion to modify that opinion."

Up to that time, Tom Johnson, while admittedly a prodigy to be reckoned with in business affairs, had shown no inclination toward public service. Yet, politics was in the tradition of his family. Among his ancestors he counted some who had been members of Congress and governors, and one who even had been Vice President of the United States—Richard M. Johnson, who served with President Martin Van Buren from 1837 to 1841.

The turning point in Tom Johnson's life came in 1883 when he bought a book called *Social Problems,* by Henry George, to while away the time on a train trip. The book disturbed him deeply, as did another work by the same political economist, *Progress and Poverty.*

George's theory of the single tax—a tax on land values, including the value of all franchises and public utilities operated for private profit—and his fiery denunciation of the way in which the economic system was tilted in favor of the vested interests, whom he grouped under the name of Privilege, came to the twenty-six-year-old capitalist like a messianic call.

He struggled briefly against the call because what George preached was, in effect, a condemnation of the very monopolistic system and the very practices that were making Johnson rich. In the end, unable to repudiate George's arguments even with the help of the best intellects around him, Johnson capitulated. He went to Henry George

Condon, George E.. Cleveland : the best kept secret.
New York, NY, USA: Doubleday, 1967. p 175.
http://site.ebrary.com/lib/clevelandstatedr/Doc?id=10440741&ppg=175

at his home in Brooklyn in 1885, assured himself of the man's greatness in a series of conversations, and became his lifelong disciple.

It was because of Henry George that Tom Johnson went into politics. His first political speech, a gasping, five-minute struggle, was made in behalf of George's candidacy for mayor of New York. It was symptomatic of the painful readjustment Johnson would have to make in his way of life.

The effect of George's philosophy on him was profound, as his friend, Frederic Howe, noted in his *Confessions of a Reformer:*

"He [Johnson] lived with Henry George whom he loved; had talked every phase of his philosophy through with him. He had its deeper social significance at his finger tips. The single tax had come to him like St. Paul's vision on the road to Damascus, changing a monopolist into the most dangerous enemy that monopoly could have—an enemy not of men but of institutions."

Said Johnson, speaking about Henry George's book:

"If this book is really true, I shall have to give up business. It isn't right for me to make money out of protected industries, out of street railway franchises, out of land speculation. I must get out of business or prove that this book is wrong."

But he did not abandon his business career at that time, nor did he prove George wrong. He continued to shine as one of the most successful capitalists of his generation, but some of the sparkle had gone out of the moneymaking game.

"I continued my business with as much zest as ever," he said, "but my point of view was no longer that of a man whose chief object in life is to get rich."

It was the beginning of greatness for Tom L. Johnson.

Three years after his meeting with Henry George, Johnson projected himself into politics as an active aspirant to office. He won the nomination as candidate for Congress from Cleveland's 21st District on the Democratic ticket. He was defeated handily by the haughty Theodore E. Burton.

He made the same race again two years later against the same opponent, but Representive Burton this time made the tactical error that Richard M. Nixon would make against John F. Kennedy—he engaged Johnson in a series of debates. Johnson gave him a drubbing on the platform. It was a case of old-fashioned political oratory against a naïve kind of candor, and the voters liked the contrasting plain talk. Johnson was elected to Congress and served two terms in which he led the fight for free trade at a time when proponents of high tariff protectionism were riding high in the saddle. He was defeated by his old rival, Burton, in the 1894 election and turned his attention back to business.

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