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When the Republican National Convention met in St. Louis, June 16, 1896, "the nomination of Major McKinley," said the Annual Cyclopedia for that year, "was practically assured." (P.687) This was due, in large measure, to the indefatigable efforts of one man, Marcus Alonzo Hanna, or Mark Hanna as he was more generally called.

From 1893 on, when McKinley had gotten 182 votes in the Republican convention which re-nominated Harrison, Hanna began an active campaign to keep McKinley in the forefront as the candidate for '96. In 1893 McKinley was re-elected governor of Ohio by a majority of 80,000 votes, the greatest that any candidate had received since the Civil War, and many of the congratulations that he received hailed him as the next President. "On November 18 a cartoon was published in the (Cleveland Leader), in which Uncle Sam was pointing to the rising sun of McKinley in 1896 and with it the dawn of renewed prosperity." (Croly, Hanna, P.171) Hanna seized upon this idea, that the nomination and election of McKinley would mean a revival of business activity, for "the dominant object of political policy and action was from his business point of view the encouragement of a steady and general economic prosperity. Therefore a systematic attempt was made to impress McKinley on the popular mind as the 'advance agent' of prosperity." (Ibid) Moreover, the troubles which the Democratic party was having with its tariff reform and the Wilson Bill, also helped to bolster up McKinley's cause, for the tariff was known to be his chief stock-in-trade. In 1894 Hanna retired from active business and devoted all his time and energy to boosting McKinley. Believing that "no man in public life owes the public anything" he set out to "acquire" a convention in 1896 which would accept his candidate, just as he had formerly set out to "acquire" railways, coal mines, newspapers, and other business enterprises, and the political machine of Cleveland.

Insofar as his liking for McKinley went, however, he seems to have been perfectly sincere. According to a report in the New York Tribune of June 21, 1896, he once exclaimed enthusiastically, "I love McKinley! He is the best man I ever knew." "Uncle Mark" then rented a house in Thomasville, Georgia, to which he invited "the affable Governor" as well as "a great deal of company to meet the Governor.---Gentlemen from all over the South flocked to Mr. Hanna's home, in order to have a little chat with the Governor and his friend." (The color line was not drawn and many negroes came to see McKinley and speak with him.) The result of this policy and McKinley's "winning personality" and his courtesy and affability was that a considerable majority of the Southern delegates to the Republican National Convention of 1896 were won over to McKinley. (Croly, 176) In the West too, Hanna worked for McKinley, shrewdly keeping the money question in the background as much as he could, and constantly harping on
the tariff question. Indeed although Hanna favored a gold standard, McKinley had voted for the Bland-Allison Act of 1878 and helped to pass it over President Hayes' veto, and had supported the Sherman Bill in 1890 and had been wroth with Cleveland for having "struck down silver." However, by this time he had become converted to a gold policy and had approved a draft of the money plank which Hanna meant to have the convention insert in the Republican platform. Hanna's task therefore was to keep the sound-money men of the East quietly assured of McKinley's 'conversion' to gold, without letting it become known to the silver Republicans of the West before the nomination was secured. (Muzzey, II, 278) These tactics were successful and when, finally, the Committee on Resolutions presented a platform which declared: "The Republican party is unreservedly for sound money—We are unalterably opposed to every measure calculated to debase our currency or impair the credit of our country. We are therefore opposed to the free coinage of silver except by international agreement with the leading commercial nations of the world, which we pledge ourselves to promote, and until such agreement can be obtained the existing gold standard must be preserved. All our silver and paper currency must be maintained at parity with gold, and we favor all measures designed to maintain inviolably the obligations of the United States and all our money, whether coin or paper, at the present standard, the standard of the most enlightened nations of the earth." It was too late for the silver Republicans to prevent McKinley's nomination. Senator Teller of Colorado offered a substitute plank declaring for the "use of both gold and silver as equal standard money" but this was voted down by a vote of 818 to 105. Thereupon Mr. Teller and 35 other delegates withdrew from the convention, most of them joining the ranks of the Democratic party.

McKinley was then nominated on June 18 with Garrett A. Hobart of New Jersey as the candidate for Vice-President. The Republican platform also characterized the Cleveland administration as "a record of unparalleled incapacity, dishonor, and disaster," and reiterated the Republican principle that the policy of protection was "the bulwark of American industrial independence and the foundation of American development and prosperity." It further declared that "Protection and Reciprocity are twin measures of Republican policy and go hand in hand. Democratic rule has recklessly struck down both, and both must be re-established."