

THEODORE DREISER

*A Mayor and His People*

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HERE IS the story of an individual whose political and social example, if such things are ever worth anything (the moralists to the contrary notwithstanding), should have been, at the time, of the greatest importance to every citizen of the United States. Only it was not. Or was it? Who really knows? Anyway, he and his career are entirely forgotten by now, and have been these many years.

He was the mayor of one of those dreary New England mill towns in northern Massachusetts—a bleak, pleasureless realm of about forty thousand, where, from the time he was born until he finally left at the age of thirty-six to seek his fortune elsewhere, he had resided without change. During that time he had worked in various of the local mills, which in one way and another involved nearly all of the population. He was a mill shoe-maker by trade, or, in other words, a factory shoe-hand, knowing only a part of all the processes necessary to make a shoe in that fashion. Still, he was a fair workman, and earned as much as fifteen or eighteen dollars a week at times—rather good pay for that region. By temperament a humanitarian, or possibly because of his own humble state one who was compelled to take cognizance of the difficulties of others, he finally expressed his mental unrest by organizing a club for the study and propagation of socialism, and later, when it became powerful enough to have a candidate and look for political expression of some kind, he was its first, and thereafter for a number of years, its regular candidate for mayor. For a long time, or until its membership became sufficient to attract some slight political attention, its members (following our regular American, unintellectual custom) were looked upon by the rest of the people as a body of harmless kickers, filled with fool notions about a man's duty to his fellowman, some silly dream about an honest and economical administration of public affairs—their city's affairs, to be exact. We are so wise in America, so interested in our fellowman, so regardful of his welfare. They were so small in number, however, that they were little more than an object of pleasant jest, useful for that purpose alone.

This club, however, continued to put up its candidate until about 1895, when suddenly it succeeded in polling the very modest number of fifty-four votes—double the number it had succeeded in polling any previous year. A year later one hundred and thirty-six were registered, and the next year six hundred. Then suddenly the mayor who won that year's battle died, and a special election was called. Here the club polled six hundred and one, a total and astonishing gain of one. In 1898 the perennial candidate was again nominated and received fifteen hundred, and in 1899, when he ran again, twenty-three hundred votes, which elected him.

If this fact be registered casually here, it was not so regarded in that typically New England mill town. Ever study New England—its Puritan, self-defensive, but unintellectual and selfish psychology? Although this poor little snip of a mayor was only elected for one year, men paused astounded, those who had not voted for him, and several of the older conventional political and religious order, wedded to their church and all the routine of the average puritanic mill town, actually cried. No one knew, of course, who the new mayor was, or what he stood for. There were open assertions that the club behind him was anarchistic—that ever-ready charge against anything new in America—and that the courts should be called upon to prevent his being seated. And this from people who were as poorly “off” commercially and socially as any might well be. It was stated, as proving the worst, that he was, or had been, a mill worker!—and, before that a grocery clerk—both at twelve a week, or less!! Immediate division of property, the forcing of all employers to pay as much as five a day to every laborer (an unheard-of sum in New England), and general constraint and subversion of individual rights (things then unknown in America, of course), loomed in the minds of these conventional Americans as the natural and immediate result of so modest a victory. The old-time politicians and corporations who understood much better what the point was, the significance of this straw, were more or less disgruntled, but satisfied that it could be undone later.

An actual conversation which occurred on one of the outlying street corners one evening about dusk will best illustrate the entire situation.

"Who is the man, anyway?" asked one citizen of a total stranger whom he had chanced to meet.

"Oh, no one in particular, I think. A grocery clerk, they say."

"Astonishing, isn't it? Why, I never thought those people would get anything. Why, they didn't even figure last year."

"Seems to be considerable doubt as to just what he'll do."

"That's what I've been wondering. I don't take much stock in all their talk about anarchy. A man hasn't so very much power as mayor."

"No," said the other.

"We ought to give him a trial, anyway. He's won a big fight. I should like to see him, see what he looks like."

"Oh, nothing startling. I know him."

"Rather young, ain't he?"

"Yes."

"Where did he come from?"

"Oh, right around here."

"Was he a mill-hand?"

"Yes."

The stranger made inquiry as to other facts and then turned off at a corner.

"Well," he observed at parting, "I don't know. I'm inclined to believe in the man. I should like to see him myself. Good-night."

"Good-night," said the other, waving his hand. "When you see me again you will know that you are looking at the mayor."

The inquirer stared after him and saw a six-foot citizen, of otherwise medium proportions, whose long, youthful face and mild gray eyes, with just a suggestion of washed-out blue in them, were hardly what was to be expected of a notorious and otherwise astounding political figure.

"He is too young," was the earliest comments, when the public once became aware of his personality.

"Why, he is nothing but a grocery clerk," was another, the skeptical and condemnatory possibilities of which need not be dilated upon here.

And he was, in his way—nothing much of a genius, as such things go in politics, but an interesting figure. Without

much taste (or its cultivated shadow) or great vision of any kind, he was still a man who sensed the evils of great and often unnecessary social inequalities and the need of reorganizing influences, which would tend to narrow the vast gulf between the unorganized and ignorant poor, and the huge beneficiaries of unearned (yes, and not even understood) increment. For what does the economic wisdom of the average capitalist amount to, after all: the narrow, gourmandizing hunger of the average multi-millionaire?

At any rate, people watched him as he went to and fro between his office and his home, and reached the general conclusion after the first excitement had died down that he did not amount to much.

When introduced into his office in the small but pleasant city hall, he came into contact with a "ring," and a fixed condition, which nobody imagined a lone young mayor could change. Old-time politicians sat there giving out contracts for street-cleaning, lighting, improvements and supplies of all kinds, and a bond of mutual profit bound them closely together.

"I don't think he can do much to hurt us," these individuals said one to another. "He don't amount to much."

The mayor was not of a talkative or confiding turn. Neither was he cold or wanting in good and natural manners. He was, however, of a preoccupied turn of mind, "up in the air," some called it, and smoked a good many cigars.

"I think we ought to get together and have some sort of a conference about the letting of contracts," said the president of the city council to him one morning shortly after he had been installed. "You will find these gentlemen ready to meet you half-way in these matters."

"I'm very glad to hear that," he replied. "I've something to say in my message to the council, which I'll send over in the morning."

The old-time politician eyed him curiously, and he eyed the old-time politician in turn, not aggressively, but as if they might come to a very pleasant understanding if they wanted to, and then went back to his office.

The next day his message was made public, and this was its key-note:

"All contract work for the city should be let with a proviso, that the workmen employed receive not less than two dollars a day."

The dissatisfied roar that followed was not long in making itself heard all over the city.

"Stuff and nonsense," yelled the office jobbers in a chorus. "Socialism!" "Anarchy!" "This thing must be put down!" "The city would be bankrupt in a year." "No contractor could afford to pay his ordinary day laborers two a day. The city could not afford to pay any contractor enough to do it."

"The prosperity of the city is not greater than the prosperity of the largest number of its component individuals," replied the mayor, in a somewhat altruistic and economically abstruse argument on the floor of the council hall. "We must find contractors."

"We'll see about that," said the members of the opposition. "Why, the man's crazy. If he thinks he can run this town on a goody-good basis and make everybody rich and happy, he's going to get badly fooled, that's all there is to that."

Fortunately for him three of the eight council members were fellows of the mayor's own economic beliefs, individuals elected on the same ticket with him. These men could not carry a resolution, but they could stop one from being carried over the mayor's veto. Hence it was found that if the contracts could not be given to men satisfactory to the mayor they could not be given at all, and he stood in a fair way to win.

"What the hell's the use of us sitting here day after day!" were the actual words of the leading members of the opposition in the council some weeks later, when the fight became wearisome. "We can't pass the contracts over his veto. I say let 'em go."

So the proviso was tacked on, that two a day was the minimum wage to be allowed, and the contracts passed.

The mayor's followers were exceedingly jubilant at this, more so than he, who was of a more cautious and less hopeful temperament.

"Not out of the woods yet, gentlemen," he remarked to a group of his adherents at the reform club. "We have to do a great many things sensibly if we expect to keep the people's confidence and 'win again.'"

Under the old system of letting contracts, whenever there was a wage rate stipulated, men were paid little or nothing, and the work was not done. There was no pretense of doing it. Garbage and ashes accumulated, and papers littered the streets. The old contractor who had pocketed the appropriated sum thought to do so again.

"I hear the citizens are complaining as much as ever," said the mayor to this individual one morning. "You will have to keep the streets clean."

The contractor, a robust, thick-necked, heavy-jawed Irishman, of just so much refinement as the sudden acquisition of a comfortable fortune would allow, looked him quizzically over, wondering whether he was "out" for a portion of the appropriation or whether he was really serious.

"We can fix that between us," he said.

"There's nothing to fix," replied the mayor. "All I want you to do is to clean the streets."

The contractor went away and for a few days after the streets were really clean, but it was only for a few days.

In his walks about the city the mayor himself found garbage and paper uncollected, and then called upon his new acquaintance again.

"I'm mentioning this for the last time, Mr. M——," he said. "You will have to fulfill your contract, or resign in favor of some one who will."

"Oh, I'll clean them, well enough," said this individual, after five minutes of rapid fire explanation. "Two dollars a day for men is high, but I'll see that they're clean."

Again he went away, and again the mayor sauntered about, and then one morning sought out the contractor in his own office.

"This is the end," he said, removing a cigar from his mouth and holding it before him with his elbow at right angles. "You are discharged from this work. I'll notify you officially to-morrow."

"It can't be done the way you want it," the contractor exclaimed with an oath. "There's no money in it at two dollars. Hell, anybody can see that."

"Very well," said the mayor in a kindly well-modulated tone. "Let another man try, then."

The next day he appointed a new contractor, and with a schedule before him showing how many men should be employed and how much profit he might expect, the latter succeeded. The garbage was daily removed, and the streets carefully cleaned.

Then there was a new manual training school about to be added to the public school system at this time, and the contract for building was to be let, when the mayor threw a bomb into the midst of the old-time jobbers at the city council. A contractor had already been chosen by them and the members were figuring out their profits, when at one of the public discussions of the subject the mayor said:

"Why shouldn't the city build it, gentlemen?"

"How can it?" exclaimed the councilmen. "The city isn't an individual; it can't watch carefully."

"It can hire its own architect, as well as any contractor. Let's try it."

There were sullen tempers in the council chamber after this, but the mayor was insistent. He called an architect who made a ridiculously low estimate. Never had a public building been estimated so cheaply before.

"See here," said one of the councilmen when the plans were presented to the chamber—"This isn't doing this city right, and the gentlemen of the council ought to put their feet down on any such venture as this. You're going to waste the city's money on some cheap thing in order to catch votes."

"I'll publish the cost of the goods as delivered," said the mayor. "Then the people can look at the building when it's built. We'll see how cheap it looks then."

To head off political trickery on the part of the enemy he secured bills for material as delivered, and publicly compared them with prices paid for similar amounts of the same material used in other buildings. So the public was kept aware of what was going on and the cry of cheapness for political purposes set at naught. It was the first public structure erected by the city, and by all means the cheapest and best of all the city's buildings.

Excellent as these services were in their way, the mayor realized later that a powerful opposition was being generated and that if he were to retain the interest of his constituents

he would have to set about something which would endear him and his cause to the public.

"I may be honest," he told one of his friends, "but honesty will play a lone hand with these people. The public isn't interested in its own welfare very much. It can't be bothered or hasn't the time. What I need is something that will impress it and still be worth while. I can't be reelected on promises, or on my looks, either."

When he looked about him, however, he found the possibility of independent municipal action pretty well hampered by mandatory legislation. He had promised, for instance, to do all he could to lower the exorbitant gas rate and to abolish grade crossings, but the law said that no municipality could do either of these things without first voting to do so three years in succession—a little precaution taken by the corporation representing such things long before he came into power. Each vote must be for such contemplated action, or it could not become a law.

"I know well enough that promises are all right," he said to one of his friends, "and that these laws are good enough excuses, but the public won't take excuses from me for three years. If I want to be mayor again I want to be doing something, and doing it quick."

In the city was a gas corporation, originally capitalized at \$45,000, and subsequently increased to \$75,000, which was earning that year the actual sum of \$58,000 over and above all expenses. It was getting ready to inflate the capitalization, as usual, and water its stock to the extent of \$500,000, when it occurred to the mayor that if the corporation was making such enormous profits out of a \$75,000 investment as to be able to offer to pay six per cent on \$500,000 to investors, and put the money it would get for such stocks into its pocket, perhaps it could reduce the price of gas from one dollar and nineteen cents to a more reasonable figure. There was the three years' voting law, however, behind which, as behind an entrenchment, the very luxurious corporation lay comfortable and indifferent.

The mayor sent for his corporation counsel, and studied gas law for awhile. He found that at the State capital there was a State board, or commission, which had been created to



look after gas companies in general, and to hear the complaints of municipalities which considered themselves unjustly treated.

"This is the thing for me," he said.

Lacking the municipal authority himself, he decided to present the facts in the case and appeal to this commission for a reduction of the gas rate.

When he came to talk about it he found that the opposition he would generate would be something much more than local. Back of the local reduction idea was the whole system of extortionate gas rates of the State and of the nation; hundreds of fat, luxurious gas corporations whose dividends would be threatened by any agitation on this question.

"You mean to proceed with this scheme of yours?" asked a prominent member of the local bar who called one morning to interview him. "I represent the gentlemen who are interested in our local gas company."

"I certainly do," replied the mayor.

"Well," replied the uncredentialed representative of private interests, after expostulating a long time and offering various "reasons" why it would be more profitable and politically advantageous for the new mayor not to proceed, "I've said all I can say. Now I want to tell you that you are going up against a combination that will be your ruin. You're not dealing with this town now; you're dealing with the State, the whole nation. These corporations can't afford to let you win, and they won't. You're not the one to do it; you're not big enough."

The mayor smiled and replied that of course he could not say as to that.

The lawyer went away, and that next day the mayor had his legal counsel look up the annual reports of the company for the consecutive years of its existence, as well as a bulletin issued by a firm of brokers, into whose hands the matter of selling a vast amount of watered stock it proposed to issue had been placed. He also sent for a gas expert and set him to figuring out a case for the people.

It was found by this gentleman that since the company was first organized it had paid dividends on its capital stock at the rate of ten per cent per annum, for the first thirty years; had made vast improvements in the last ten, and notwithstanding

this fact, had paid twenty per cent, and even twenty-five per cent per annum in dividends. All the details of cost and expenditure were figured out, and then the mayor with his counsel took the train for the State capitol.

Never was there more excitement in political circles than when this young representative of no important political organization whatsoever arrived at the State capitol and walked, at the appointed time, into the private audience room of the commission. Every gas company, as well as every newspaper and every other representative of the people, had curiously enough become interested in the fight he was making, and there was a band of reporters at the hotel where he was stopping, as well as in the commission chambers in the State capitol where the hearing was to be. They wanted to know about him—why he was doing this, whether it wasn't a "strike" or the work of some rival corporation. The fact that he might foolishly be sincere was hard to believe.

"Gentlemen," said the mayor, as he took his stand in front of an august array of legal talent which was waiting to pick his argument to pieces in the commission chambers at the capitol, "I miscalculated but one thing in this case which I am about to lay before you, and that is the extent of public interest. I came here prepared to make a private argument, but now I want to ask the privilege of making it public. I see the public itself is interested, or should be. I will ask leave to postpone my argument until the day after tomorrow."

There was considerable hemming and hawing over this, since from the point of view of the corporation it was most undesirable, but the commission was practically powerless to do aught but grant his request. And meanwhile the interest created by the newspapers added power to his cause. Hunting up the several representatives and senators from his district, he compelled them to take cognizance of the cause for which he was battling, and when the morning of the public hearing arrived a large audience was assembled in the chamber of representatives.

When the final moment arrived the young mayor came forward, and after making a very simple statement of the cause which led him to request a public hearing and the local condition which he considered unfair begged leave to introduce

an expert, a national examiner of gas plants and lighting facilities, for whom he had sent, and whose twenty years of experience in this line had enabled him to prepare a paper on the condition of the gas-payers in the mayor's city.

The commission was not a little surprised by this, but signified its willingness to hear the expert as counsel for the city, and as his statement was read a very clear light was thrown upon the situation.

Counsel for the various gas corporations interrupted freely. The mayor himself was constantly drawn into the argument, but his replies were so simple and convincing that there was not much satisfaction to be had in stirring him. Instead, the various counsel took refuge in long-winded discussions about the methods of conducting gas plants in other cities, the cost of machinery, labor and the like, which took days and days, and threatened to extend into weeks. The astounding facts concerning large profits and the present intentions of not only this but every other company in the State could not be dismissed. In fact the revelation of huge corporation profits everywhere became so disturbing that after the committee had considered and re-considered, it finally, when threatened with political extermination, voted to reduce the price of gas to eighty cents.

It is needless to suggest the local influence of this decision. When the mayor came home he received an ovation, and that at the hands of many of the people who had once been so fearful of him, but he knew that this enthusiasm would not last long. Many disgruntled elements were warring against him, and others were being more and more stirred up. His home life was looked into as well as his past, his least childish or private actions. It was a case of finding other opportunities for public usefulness, or falling into the innocuous peace which would result in his defeat.

In the platform on which he had been elected was a plank which declared that it was the intention of this party, if elected, to abolish local grade crossings, the maintenance of which had been the cause of numerous accidents and much public complaint. With this plank he now proposed to deal.

In this of course he was hampered by the law before mentioned, which declared that no city could abolish its grade

crossings without having first submitted the matter to the people during three successive years and obtained their approval each time. Behind this law was not now, however, as in the case of the gas company, a small \$500,000 corporation, but all the railroads which controlled New England, and to which brains and legislators, courts and juries, were mere adjuncts. Furthermore, the question would have to be voted on at the same time as his candidacy, and this would have deterred many another more ambitious politician. The mayor was not to be deterred, however. He began his agitation, and the enemy began theirs, but in the midst of what seemed to be a fair battle the great railway company endeavored to steal a march. There was suddenly and secretly introduced into the lower house of the State legislature a bill which in deceptive phraseology declared that the law which allowed all cities, by three successive votes, to abolish grade crossings in three years, was, in the case of a particular city mentioned, hereby abrogated for a term of four years. The question might not even be discussed politically.

When the news of this attempt reached the mayor, he took the first train for the State capitol and arrived there just in time to come upon the floor of the house when the bill was being taken up for discussion. He asked leave to make a statement. Great excitement was aroused by his timely arrival. Those who secretly favored the bill endeavored to have the matter referred to a committee, but this was not to be. One member moved to go on with the consideration of the bill, and after a close vote the motion carried.

The mayor was then introduced.

After a few moments, in which the silent self-communing with which he introduced himself impressed everyone with his sincerity, he said:

"I am accused of objecting to this measure because its enactment will remove, as a political issue, the one cause upon which I base my hope for reelection. If there are no elevated crossings to vote for, there will be no excuse for voting for me. Gentlemen, you mistake the temper and the intellect of the people of our city. It is you who see political significance in this thing, but let me assure you that it is of a far different kind from that which you conceive. If the passing of this

measure had any significance to me other than the apparent wrong of it, I would get down on my knees and urge its immediate acceptance. Nothing could elect me quicker. Nothing could bury the opposition further from view. If you wish above all things to accomplish my triumph you will only need to interfere with the rights of our city in this arbitrary manner, and you will have the thing done. I could absolutely ask nothing more."

The gentlemen who had this measure in charge weighed well these assertions and trifled for weeks with the matter, trying to make up their minds.

Meanwhile election time approached, and amid the growing interest of politics it was thought unwise to deal with it. A great fight was arranged for locally, in which every conceivable element of opposition was beautifully harmonized by forces and conceptions which it is almost impossible to explain. Democrats, republicans, prohibitionists, saloon men and religious circles, all were gathered into one harmonious body and inspired with a single idea, that of defeating the mayor. From some quarter, not exactly identified, was issued a call for a civic committee of fifty, which should take into its hands the duty of rescuing the city from what was termed a "throttling policy of commercial oppression and anarchy." Democrats, republicans, liquor and anti-liquorites, were invited to the same central meeting place, and came. Money was not lacking, nor able minds, to prepare campaign literature. It was openly charged that a blank check was handed in to the chairman of this body by the railway whose crossings were in danger, to be filled out for any amount necessary to the destruction of the official upstart who was seeking to revolutionize old methods and conditions.

As may be expected, this opposition did not lack daring in making assertions contrary to facts. Charges were now made that the mayor was in league with the railroad to foist upon the city a great burden of expense, because the law under which cities could compel railroads to elevate their tracks declared that one-fifth of the burden of expense must be borne by the city and the remaining four-fifths by the railroad. It would saddle a debt of \$250,000 upon the taxpayers, they said, and give them little in return. All the advantage would

be with the railroad. "Postpone this action until the railroad can be forced to bear the entire expense, as it justly should," declared handbill writers, whose services were readily rendered to those who could afford to pay for them.

The mayor and his committee, although poor, answered with handbills and street corner speeches, in which he showed that even with the extravagantly estimated debt of \$250,000, the city's tax-rate would not be increased by quite six cents to the individual. The cry that each man would have to pay five dollars more each year for ten years was thus wholesomely disposed of, and the campaign proceeded.

Now came every conceivable sort of charge. If he were not defeated, all reputable merchants would surely leave the city. Capital was certainly being scared off. There would be idle factories and empty stomachs. Look out for hard times. No one but a fool would invest in a city thus hampered.

In reply the mayor preached a fair return by corporations for benefits received. He, or rather his organization, took a door-to-door census of his following, and discovered a very considerable increase in the number of those intending to vote for him. The closest calculations of the enemy were discovered, the actual number they had fixed upon as sufficient to defeat him. This proved to the mayor that he must have three hundred more votes if he wished to be absolutely sure. These he hunted out from among the enemy, and had them pledged before the eventual morning came.

The night preceding election ended the campaign, for the enemy at least, in a blaze of glory, so to speak. Dozens of speakers for both causes were about the street corners and in the city meeting room.

Oratory poured forth in streams, and gasoline-lighted band-wagons rattled from street to street, emitting song and invective. Even a great parade was arranged by the anti-mayoral forces, in which horses and men to the number of hundreds were brought in from nearby cities and palmed off as enthusiastic citizens.

"Horses don't vote," a watchword handed out by the mayor, took the edge off the extreme ardor of this invading throng, and set to laughing the hundreds of his partisans, who needed such encouragement.

Next day came the vote, and then for once, anyhow, he was justified. Not only was a much larger vote cast than ever, but he thrashed the enemy with a tail of two hundred votes to spare. It was an inspiring victory from one point of view, but rather doleful for the enemy. The latter had imported a car-load of fireworks, which now stood sadly unused upon the very tracks which, apparently, must in the future be raised. The crowning insult was offered when the successful forces offered to take them off their hands at half price.

For a year thereafter (a mayor was elected yearly there), less was heard of the commercial destruction of the city. Gas stood, as decided, at eighty cents a thousand. A new manual training school, built at a very nominal cost, a monument to municipal honesty, was also in evidence. The public water-works had also been enlarged and the rates reduced. The streets were clean.

Then the mayor made another innovation. During his first term of office there had been a weekly meeting of the reform club, at which he appeared and talked freely of his plans and difficulties. These meetings he now proposed to make public.

Every Wednesday evening for a year thereafter a spectacle of municipal self-consciousness was witnessed, which those who saw it felt sure would redound to the greater strength and popularity of the mayor. In a large hall, devoted to public gatherings, a municipal meeting was held. Every one was invited. The mayor was both host and guest, an individual who chose to explain his conduct and his difficulties and to ask advice. There his constituents gathered, not only to hear but to offer counsel.

"Gentlemen," so ran the gist of his remarks on various of these occasions, "the present week has proved a most trying one. I am confronted by a number of difficult problems, which I will now try to explain to you. In the first place, you know my limitations as to power in the council. But three members now vote for me, and it is only by mutual concessions that we move forward at all."

Then would follow a detailed statement of the difficulties, and a general discussion. The commonest laborer was free to offer his advice. Every question was answered in the broadest spirit of fellowship. An inquiry as to "what to do" frequently

brought the most helpful advice. Weak and impossible solutions were met as such, and shown to be what they were. Radicals were assuaged, conservatives urged forward. The whole political situation was so detailed and explained that no intelligent person could leave, it was thought, with a false impression of the mayor's position or intent.

With five thousand or more such associated citizens abroad each day explaining, defending, approving the official conduct of the mayor, because they understood it, no misleading conceptions, it was thought, could arise. Men said that his purpose and current leaning in any matter was always clear. He was thought to be closer to his constituency than any other official within the whole range of the Americas and that there could be nothing but unreasoning partisan opposition to his rule.

After one year of such service a presidential campaign drew near, and the mayor's campaign for reelection had to be contested at the same time. No gas monopoly evil was now a subject of contention. Streets were clean, contracts fairly executed; the general municipal interests as satisfactorily attended to as could be expected. Only the grade crossing war remained as an issue, and that would require still another vote after this. His record was the only available campaign argument.

On the other side, however, were the two organizations of the locally defeated great parties, and the railroad. The latter, insistent in its bitterness, now organized these two bodies into a powerful opposition. Newspapers were subsidized; the national significance of the campaign magnified; a large number of railroad-hands colonized. When the final weeks of the campaign arrived a bitter contest was waged, and money triumphed. Five thousand four hundred votes were cast for the mayor. Five thousand four hundred and fifty for the opposing candidate, who was of the same party as the successful presidential nominee.

It was a bitter blow, but still one easily borne by the mayor, who was considerable of a philosopher. With simple, undisturbed grace he retired, and three days later applied to one of the principal shoe factories for work at his trade.

"What? You're not looking for a job, are you?" exclaimed the astonished foreman.



"I am," said the mayor.

"You can go to work, all right, but I should think you could get into something better now."

"I suppose I can later," he replied, "when I complete my law studies. Just now I want to do this for a change, to see how things are with the rank and file." And donning the apron he had brought with him he went to work.

It was not long, however, before he was discharged, largely because of partisan influence anxious to drive him out of that region. It was said that this move of seeking a job in so simple a way was a bit of "grand standing"—insincere—that he didn't need to do it, and that he was trying to pile up political capital against the future. A little later a local grocery man of his social faith offered him a position as clerk, and for some odd reason—humanitarian and sectarian, possibly—he accepted this. At any rate, here he labored for a little while. Again many said he was attempting to make political capital out of this simple life in order to further his political interests later, and this possibly, even probably, was true. All men have methods of fighting for that which they believe. So here he worked for a time, while a large number of agencies pro and con continued to denounce or praise him, to ridicule or extol his so-called Jeffersonian simplicity. It was at this time that I encountered him—a tall, spare, capable and interesting individual, who willingly took me into his confidence and explained all that had hitherto befallen him. He was most interesting, really, a figure to commemorate in this fashion.

In one of the rooms of his very humble home—a kind of office or den, in a small house such as any clerk or working-man might occupy—was a collection of clippings, laudatory, inquiring, and abusive, which would have done credit to a candidate for the highest office in the land. One would have judged by the scrap-books and envelopes stuffed to overflowing with long newspaper articles and editorials that had been cut from papers all over the country from Florida to Oregon, that his every movement at this time and earlier was all-essential to the people. Plainly, he had been watched, spied upon, and ignored by one class, while being hailed, praised and invited by another. Magazine editors had called upon him for contributions, journalists from the large cities had sought him

out to obtain his actual views, citizens' leagues in various parts of the nation had invited him to come and speak, and yet he was still a very young man in years, not over-intelligent politically or philosophically, the ex-mayor of a small city, and the representative of no great organization of any sort.

In his retirement he was now comforted, if one can be so comforted, by these memories, still fresh in his mind and by the hope possibly for his own future, as well as by a droll humor with which he was wont to select the sharpest and most willful slur upon his unimpeachable conduct as an offering to public curiosity.

"Do you really want to know what people think of me?" he said to me on one occasion. "Well, here's something. Read this." And then he would hand me a bunch of the bitterest attacks possible, attacks which pictured him as a sly and treacherous enemy of the people—or worse yet a bounding anarchistic ignoramus. Personally I could not help admiring his stoic mood. It was superior to that of his detractors. Apparent falsehoods did not anger him. Evident misunderstandings could not, seemingly, disturb him.

"What do you expect?" he once said to me, after I had made a very careful study of his career for a current magazine, which, curiously, was never published. I was trying to get him to admit that he believed that his example might be fruitful of results agreeable to him in the future. I could not conclude that he really agreed with me. "People do not remember; they forget. They remember so long as you are directly before them with something that interests them. That may be a lower gas-rate, or a band that plays good music. People like strong people, and only strong people, characters of that sort—good, bad or indifferent—I've found that out. If a man or a corporation is stronger than I am, comes along and denounces me, or spends more money than I do (or can), buys more beers, makes larger promises, it is 'all day' for me. What has happened in my case is that, for the present, anyhow, I have come up against a strong corporation, stronger than I am. What I now need to do is to go out somewhere and get some more strength in some way, it doesn't matter much how. People are not so much interested in me or you, or your or my ideals in their behalf, as they are in strength,

an interesting spectacle. And they are easily deceived. These big fighting corporations with their attorneys and politicians and newspapers make me look weak—puny. So the people forget me. If I could get out, raise one million or five hundred thousand dollars and give the corporations a good drubbing, they would adore me—for awhile. Then I would have to go out and get another five hundred thousand somewhere, or do something else.”

“Quite so,” I replied. “Yet *Vox populi, vox dei.*”

Sitting upon his own doorstep one evening, in a very modest quarter of the city, I said:

“Were you very much depressed by your defeat the last time?”

“Not at all,” he replied. “Action, reaction, that’s the law. All these things right themselves in time, I suppose, or, anyhow, they ought to. Maybe they don’t. Some man who can hand the people what they really need or ought to have will triumph, I suppose, some time. I don’t know, I’m sure. I hope so. I think the world is moving on, all right.”

In his serene and youthful face, the pale blue, philosophical eyes, was no evidence of dissatisfaction with the strange experiences through which he had passed.

“You’re entirely philosophical, are you?”

“As much as any one can be, I suppose. They seem to think that all my work was an evidence of my worthlessness,” he said. “Well, maybe it was. Self-interest may be the true law, and the best force. I haven’t quite made up my mind yet. My sympathies of course are all the other way. ‘He ought to be sewing shoes in the penitentiary,’ one paper once said of me. Another advised me to try something that was not above my intelligence, such as breaking rock or shoveling dirt. Most of them agreed, however,” he added with a humorous twitch of his large, expressive mouth, “that I’ll do very well if I will only stay where I am, or, better yet, get out of here. They want me to leave. That’s the best solution for them.”

He seemed to repress a smile that was hovering on his lips.

“The voice of the enemy,” I commented.

“Yes, sir, the voice of the enemy,” he added. “But don’t think that I think I’m done for. Not at all. I have just returned to my old ways in order to think this thing out. In a year or

two I'll have solved my problem, I hope. I may have to leave here, and I may not. Anyhow, I'll turn up somewhere, with something."

He did have to leave, however, public opinion never being allowed to revert to him again, and five years later, in a fairly comfortable managerial position in New York, he died. He had made a fight, well enough, but the time, the place, the stars, perhaps, were not quite right. He had no guiding genius, possibly, to pull him through. Adherents did not flock to him and save him. Possibly he wasn't magnetic enough—that pagan, non-moral, non-propagandistic quality, anyhow. The fates did not fight for him as they do for some, those fates that ignore the billions and billions of others who fail. Yet are not all lives more or less failures, however successful they may appear to be at one time or another, contrasted, let us say, with what they hoped for? We compromise so much with everything—our dreams and all.

As for his reforms, they may be coming fast enough, or they may not. *In medias res.*

But as for him . . . ?