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*A Servant of God and the People*

*"You saw go up and down Valladolid  
A man of mark, to know next time you saw."*  
—ROBERT BROWNING.

THAT Jersey City should have produced Mark Fagan is strange enough. But that Mark Fagan, grave, kind, and very brave, should have been able, as mayor, to make Jersey City what it is: a beginning of better things all over this land of ours, that is stranger still. And no man there pretends to understand it. Yet it is a simple story.

Mark as they call him—the men, the women, and the children—was born September 29, 1869, in the Fifth Ward where he lives now. His parents were poor Irish, very poor. They moved over to New York when Mark was a child, and the father died. Mark sold newspapers. The newsboy dreamed dreams and fought fights. He claimed a corner, Twelfth Street and Avenue A, developed a good trade, and when competition came, appealed to the man in the store to say if he wasn't there first. The man in the store wouldn't decide; he told the boys they must fight it out among themselves, so they laid down their papers and they fought it out. Mark held his corner. "Life is one long fight for right," he says now, this very gentle man, who fights and holds his corner.

The newsboy's dreams, like his fights, were very simple affairs. When I pried into them, I expected to hear of driving a locomotive or the presidency, at least. But no, it seems that some men said roughly that they didn't want to buy a paper, others said it kindly. Mark made up his mind that when he became a man he would be like the kind men. Sometimes the nights were cold and the newsboy felt hungry and lonely; passing houses where the family sat in the basement room, all lighted up and warm, with plenty of smoking hot food before them, Mark stopped to look in and he dreamed that when he grew up, he also would have a home. He couldn't go to school; he had only six months of it all told. But he didn't like school; it was indoors, and he has dreamed that he would like to have, in Jersey City, schools on large plots of ground, so that part of the teaching might be done in the open. But this dream came later.

When he was twelve or fourteen Mark became a helper on a wagon. Then he learned the trade of a frame-gilder with William B. Short, a Scotch man who made a deep impression on the boy. Short was a "genuine man." He was a Republican in politics. The boy was a Democrat by birth, breeding, and environment. But the man pointed out to the little Tammany Democrat on election days the Tammany line-up of men from the street into the saloon and out again, with foam on their lips and something in their hands, to the ballot-box. Mark had a painful time, talking to people on both sides, but what he saw with his own staring eyes, with the honest gilder pointing at the living facts, made the Democrat a Republican.

The next period made the boy a man. His uncle, an undertaker in Jersey City, offered Mark a job, and he moved with his mother and sister back there to take it. Now this business

often has a demoralizing effect upon men. They see dreadful sights, and they harden or take to drink. Mark saw dreadful sights; you can see that he sees them now when he recalls those days, but they softened, they sweetened Mark Fagan. He saw homes where the dead mother left nothing but a helpless child -- nothing, you understand, but the child. He saw that the poor suffered greatly from the wrongs of others, not alone of those above, but of those also that were about them, and yet, the poor were great in charity for the poor. "I came" he says, in his quiet, level tone, "I came to have pity for the poor and admiration."

You hear that Mark, the undertaker, cared for the living child as well as the dead mother; he stayed with his job after the funeral, and by and by people came to the undertaker with the business of life. His explanation is that he "could write and fix up insurance and things like that." Others could write and fix up insurance; the point was that they trusted Mark to do it, all his neighbors, all nationalities, all ages; and he did it. One of the odd branches of this odd undertaking business was to fix up marriages. It seems that, among the poor also, there comes a time soon after the wedding when husband and wife fall out; love turns to what looks like hate, and sometimes becomes hate. In Jersey City, young married people used, when the crisis arrived, to go to Mark; they'd "tell him on each other"; and he would listen and seem to judge. But what he really did was to get everything said and done with, and then when they were tired and satisfied, and sorry, he "fixed 'em up."

So far there is nothing so very extraordinary about Mark Fagan. He is a type of the men who, winning the faith and affection of their neighbours, become political leaders. "Popularity" makes them "available" as candidates or "ward bosses." Nothing was further from Mark's mind, but it was inevitable that he should go into politics, and the way he went in was natural and commonplace. One Sunday morning as he was leaving church several young fellows stopped him to propose that he run for the board of freeholders. He was "not adapted," he said; why didn't one of them run? They explained that "Bob" Davis, the Democratic boss, wouldn't let them run; wouldn't let anybody run in their party who wouldn't knuckle under to him. But Mark was a Republican. The ward, like the city and county, was heavily Democratic, and since there was so little chance of winning, the Republican ring would let anybody have the nomination. If Mark would let them, they would arrange it, fight with him, and he might be elected. They couldn't persuade Mark himself, but they knew how to get him. They went to his mother. They explained it to her, and she bade Mark run. He asked her if she understood it all, and she said she didn't, except that it seemed to be a chance to do some good in the ward.

Thus Mark Fagan was started in politics. When he took the Republican nomination and his popularity showed, the fellows that got him into the fight got out. They had to; they were called off by the bosses who ran the two parties as one. That made Mark fight the harder. Left high and dry by "the organization," he went to the people of his district.

"I was bound to win," he says, "and I felt that if I was beaten it would be because I wasn't known to enough of the voters. And, anyhow, I wanted to know my people in my ward."

So he started at 5.45 one morning at one corner of his ward, and he went systematically through it, knocking at every door, seeing every man, woman, and child; he climbed 3,700 flights of stairs in seventeen nights; and he promised to "serve the people of his ward faithfully and honestly." Mark was elected, and dirty Jersey City was amazed.

Now comes the first remarkable thing about this remarkable man. The corruption, political and financial, of the United States is built up on the betrayal of the people by the leaders, big and little, whom they trust, and the treason begins in the ward. The ward leader, having the full, fine, personal faith of his neighbours, takes their confidence and their votes, and

he delivers these things and his own soul to the party bosses who sell out the interests of the city, state, and nation to the business leaders, who as we know now use the money we entrust to them to rob us and corrupt our political, commercial and our higher life.

When Mark Fagan had taken his oath, the other, older freeholders came to him, and they invited him into “the combine.” There was no mystery about it. There was a combine and there was graft; of course a man wants his share of the graft, and though Fagan was a Republican, party made no difference; both parties were in on it, and Fagan had a right to what was coming to him. Something—the man doesn’t know exactly what it was—something which he thinks is religious, made him decline to go in. He is a quiet man, and he made no outcry. He didn’t perfectly understand anyhow, then, just what it all meant. It simply “didn’t look right” to Mark, so he did not sell out the people of his ward who trusted him to serve them. And the worst of it was, he couldn’t serve them. If he wouldn’t “stand in,” the combine wouldn’t let him have anything for his ward, not even the needed, rightful improvements. All he got were three political jobs, and they were a gift to him. The combine having distributed all the offices, had three left over. Since these were not enough to go around again, they wrangled till somebody, to save the combine, suggested giving them all to Mark. They “kind of liked” Mark, so this bit of patronage went to him with a whoop. Mark was not re-elected freeholder. He says that his inability to do things for the ward did not hurt him with his people; more of them voted for him than ever before. But the state and city rings had had a gerrymander about that time, and they so arranged the lines of Mark’s ward that he was beaten. He served his neighbours privately till the next year the Republicans nominated him for the state senate. Hopeless, anyway, the candidacy fell upon a presidential year, Bryan’s first, and the Democratic County of Hudson was wild with party enthusiasm. But the moment Mark was nominated he left the convention and, fifty feet from the door, began his campaign; he met two men; he told them he had just been nominated, that if he was elected he would serve them “honestly and faithfully,” and they promised to vote for him. In this fashion, man to man, he canvassed his county and, though it went against him, he ran way ahead of his ticket. And he carried the city.

A Republican who can carry a Democratic city is the “logical” candidate of his party for mayor, and, in 1901, Mark Fagan was nominated. Some of the little bosses warned the big bosses that they couldn’t handle him, but the big bosses pooh-poohed the fears of the little bosses. In the first place he wouldn’t be elected. The railroads, the public service companies, and some of the greatest corporations in the world have offices and properties in Jersey City, and their agents there had used money so extensively that they ruled absolutely a people supposed to be utterly corrupted. Bribery at the polls, election frauds, ballot-box stuffing, all sorts of gross political crimes had made this home of “common people” and corporations notorious. “Bob” Davis was the Democratic boss, politically speaking; but Mr. E. F. C. Young, banker, leading citizen, public utility magnate, was the business boss who, backing Davis, was the real power. Colonel Sam Dickinson, the Republican boss, was a corporation man, and one might expect that his party, which was in power in the state, would help him. But no. General Sewell, U. S. senator, Pennsylvania railroad official, and Republican state boss, dispensed Republican patronage in Hudson County, through the Democratic boss, Mr. E. F. C. Young. Sewell was dead now, but the custom survived him, and in 1901 the Democrats nominated against Fagan George T. Smith, Young’s son-in-law, an employee of the Pennsylvania. So Fagan had against him the money, the “best citizens,” the “solid, conservative business interests” of the state and city, and both rings. Hence, the certainty that Fagan would be defeated. But even if he should win the big bosses believed they could “handle him.” They had sized up the man. And if you could size up Mark

Fagan—feel his humility and see the pleading, almost dependent look of his honest, trustful eyes—you would understand how ridiculous to the big bosses the worry of the little bosses must have seemed.

An astonished city elected Mark. His quiet campaign from house to house, his earnest, simple promise to “serve you honestly and faithfully,” had beaten bribery. His kind of people believed Mark Fagan, and so, though the Republican ticket as a whole was beaten, Mark was mayor. Being mayor, Mark assumed that he was the head of the city government. He didn’t understand that his election meant simply that his boss had come into his own. He saw Governor Murphy appoint Colonel Dickinson secretary of state, and he heard that the colonel was to have some of the local patronage of the Republican state government. Mark might have assumed that he had “made” Dickinson. But he was told that it was the other way around. They walked in upon Mark the colonel who “made” him; the editor of the paper that “elected” him; and General Wanser who was ready to help “unmake” him, these and the other big Republican bosses who expected, as a matter of course, to give Jersey City a “good business government,” called on the mayor-elect. Mark, who has no humour, tried to tell me how he felt when they came and took charge of him and his office. Putting one fist to his forehead, and pressing the other hand on the back of his head (a characteristic gesture), he said that he looked up to those men; he felt his own deficiencies of education and experience; he had a heavy sense of his tremendous responsibility; and he wanted help and advice, for he wished to do right. But, you see, he was mayor. The people looked to him. He might make mistakes; but since he must answer for them to those people, man to man, you understand, and man by man, when he knocked again at their doors, why, Mark Fagan thought he ought to listen to “his party,” yes, and be “true to it,” yes; but after all, the whole people would expect him to decide all questions—all.

Mayor Fagan didn’t realize, at that time, that our constitutional governments were changed, that this was a business nation and that the government represented not the people, but business; not men, but business men. So he sat silent, apart, and perplexed—not indignant, mind you, not quarreling and arguing; no, the others did that; the mayor only listened perplexed while Colonel Dickinson and General Wanser and the rest discussed “his” policy and “his” appointments; discussed them and disagreed, quarreled, all among themselves, but finally agreed among themselves. And then, when they had settled it all and turned to him, a party in harmony, he “got off something about being mayor and reserving the right to change some items of the slate and policy.” It was their turn to be perplexed. Perplexed? They left him in a rage to “go to the devil.”

The mayor, abandoned, proceeded with a quiet study he was making all by himself of the city. He went about, visiting the departments, meeting officials, and asking questions. People wrote complaints to him, and some of them were as perplexed as the bosses when Mayor Fagan answered their letters in person, looked into their troubles, and went off to “fix ’em up.” There were lots of things for a mayor to do: parents couldn’t get their children into school; no room. Families couldn’t get water above the second floor; no force. Cellars were flooded; pipes leaked. Jersey City, corrupt, neglected, robbed, needed everything. And Mayor Fagan took its needs seriously. He must have more schools, more and better sewers, more water; and he did want to add a public bath and parks and music in the parks. “I wanted,” he says, “to make Jersey City a pleasant place to live in; I’d like to make it pretty.” Jersey City pretty! Were you ever in Jersey City? I suppose when your train was coming through Jersey City you were gathering up your things and being brushed by the porter; you probably never looked out of the window. Well, look next time and you will see that what the railroad attorneys say is true:

“It’s nothing but a railroad terminal. They talk about the railroads owning it; the railroads ought to own it. It’s the terminal of the traffic of a continent.”

Nevertheless, Mark Fagan, who lived there and who knew personally so many families that lived and must always live there, he, their mayor, dreamed of making it a pleasant city to live in. How? Money, lots of money, was needed, and how was money to be raised for such a purpose? When he had broached his idea to the bosses it seemed to fill them with disgust, and now that they were gone, he didn’t know what to do. He needed help, and help came.

Among the appointments recommended to him by Colonel Dickinson was that of George L. Record, to be corporation counsel. Record, an able lawyer, had been the principal orator in the campaign, and the mayor “took to him.” But it was whispered that Record was interested in a contracting company which was building waterworks for the city, and the mayor, suspicious by this time of everybody, hesitated. Record was resentful, but he had had dreams of his own once. He had read Henry George and his dreams were of economic reforms—taxation. But he had fought the bosses in vain, and was about ready to give up when, reflecting upon the rock they all had struck at the bottom of this mild mayor’s character, he saw that “by Jove, here was an honest man who could make people believe in his honesty.” He went to see him. The water business was explained; Record had been engaged only as a broker, and he was out of it. He was free to take Mark’s pledge to be “loyal to the mayor and the people of Jersey City.” They had a long, warm talk. The mayor’s mind ran to the betterment of the physical conditions of life; Record’s to more fundamental reforms, but taxation was the way to raise money to make the city pleasant.

They outlined a policy. They took in others to form a cabinet: Edgar B. Bacon, Frank J. Higgins, Edward Fry, and Robert Carey—all these, and Record and Fagan, are Mark Fagan. They discuss questions as they arise, and the mayor decides; they agree, but Mark is the mayor. Some people say Record is the boss, but he laughs.

“The big grafters know better,” he says. “They failed to handle Mark, and when they found that I was ‘next’ they asked me to sell him out. I didn’t tell them that I wouldn’t; I told them I couldn’t. And I can’t, and they know I can’t. I can advise, I can instruct, and the man will try, actually try hard to see things as I do. For he trusts me, and he wants to be shown. He wants to know. But he decides; and there’s something in him—I don’t know what it is—something that tells him what is right. No. I’ve been a help, a great help, to him, but so have the others of us, and we have helped him to decide to do things no one of us alone would have had the nerve to do. And there’s where he is great. It all comes down to this: We all agree on the right thing to do, and we do it; but when the howl goes up and the pull begins to draw, we put it all up to Mark. “Blame him.” we say; “we can’t help it” and they blame him. But that eases us, and, you see, Mark prefers it that way. He wants to stand for everything; everything. Oh, he should, yes, but you see, he wants to.”

The policy the mayor and his corporation counsel outlined was to equalize taxation. They couldn’t raise the rates; the city was overburdened with taxes already, but the corporations probably dodged their share. Record didn’t know that they did; the mayor was to see, and while he went about with the tax lists and an expert, Record had a talk with the boss, Dickinson. The mayor had consented to let the colonel have most of the patronage if “the party” would let him carry out his policy, and Record argued with Dickinson, that having made all the money he needed, it was time for him to play the big game of straight politics, take his ease and the credit of a good administration. Dickinson liked the idea.

The mayor and his expert reported that the poor paid taxes on about 70 percent of the value of their property; privileged persons on about 50 percent; the corporations on all the way

from 30 percent, to nothing. Mark Fagan had a new purpose in life. The others laughed at the old, old story; it was new to Mark, and he raised rates on the tax dodgers. There was an awful clamour, of course, and there were pulls, but all complaints were referred to the little mayor, who, seeing complex business problems in a simple way, was a rock.

Then there were the trolleys. These were valuable privileges. Why shouldn't they pay a fair tax? There was a reason why they shouldn't: Republican, as well as Democratic, bosses were in on them. This didn't deter the mayor, and when Record sounded Colonel Dickinson, the Republican boss winked the other eye. He wasn't in trolleys, and he had had a bit of a row with E. F. C. Young, the Democratic boss who was. As for the other Republican bosses who were in with Young, they might "see the mayor" for themselves. They did. When it was noised about that the sacred private property of the street car company in the middle of the public streets was to be assessed somewhat as ordinary property, General Wanser, for instance, called on the mayor.

"What's this I hear you are going to do with the trolleys, Mark?" he asked.

"Whatever is right," said Mark. "I understand they are undervalued; if they are, we will raise them."

"Well, now, I'm a good friend of yours, Mark, and I don't want you to do anything of that sort."

"If you are a good friend of mine," said Mark, "you shouldn't ask me to do anything wrong."

"Don't you know," said Wanser, "that every dollar I have in the world is in this thing?"

Mark Fagan couldn't see the relevancy of this; he talked about other people having every dollar that they had in houses and lots, and yet paying taxes. As General Wanser remarked when he left in high dudgeon, Mark Fagan had "damn queer ideas about things." He had, and he has. One of his queer ideas is what may be called a sense of public property. All men know that private property is sacred; for centuries that sense has been borne in upon us till even thieves know it is wrong to steal private property. But highly civilized men lack all sense of the sacredness of public property; from timber lands to city streets that is a private graft. And when one day the mayor received an anonymous note advising him to have the underlying franchise of the trolley company looked up, he was interested. He had the note copied in typewriting, then he scrupulously destroyed the original. The copy he gave to Corporation Counsel Record. Mr. Record discovered to his amazement that the franchise had expired. We need not go into details. The mayor and his cabinet decided to take the matter into the courts; if the court decided that the franchise belonged to the city, the mayor meant to take it. To some of the mayor's advisers this looked like a dreadful step to take; they thought of the "widows and orphans" and other innocent holders of the stock. It didn't look so bad to Colonel Dickinson; he thought only of his rival boss, E. F. C. Young, whom he had seen grabbing up the street railways under his nose. And it didn't look bad to Mayor Fagan; he thought of the "widows and orphans" who held no stock except in Jersey City, which so it seemed to Mark had as much right as an individual or a private corporation to whatever belonged to it.

Unbeknown to the cabinet, however, while they were deliberating on their discovery, the great Public Service Corporation was being formed. The big men in the Prudential Life and its Fidelity Trust Company had gone in with the U. G. I. (United Gas Improvement Co.) of Philadelphia and the Pennsylvania Railroad crowd to buy up practically all the trolleys, electric light, and other available public utility companies of New Jersey. Among these purchases were the Jersey City lines and, also, an electric light company in which Colonel Dickinson was an

employee. This was embarrassing to Dickinson; E. F. C. Young was out and Dickinson and his friends were in. Record told Fagan all about it, but, as he says, "Mark didn't care; he wasn't even interested." He made public his plan to test the franchise, the stock fell and there was a great ado. The Public Service Corporation had walked straight into politics. Tom McCarter, the attorney general, was made president of the company and his brother, Robert, was made attorney general of the state. As we all know, the new crowd acquired such a heritage of corrupt power that they were able to send the president of the Prudential, John F. Dryden, to the United States Senate. This power, and the power of the U. G. I. (the same that drove Philadelphia to revolt) came down upon Dickinson and Record. The grafters didn't want to see the mayor, but Dickinson and Record told them they must, so Dryden gave a yachting party up the Hudson. Dryden, Randall Morgan, and Tom McCarter went and Dickinson, Record, and the mayor's cabinet—all but the mayor. The party was fog-bound off Hoboken, so they had no sail, and, though they talked, they did no business. They had to see Fagan.

They saw Fagan. The U. G. I. has rooms at Sherry's for such business, and there one afternoon was held a conference which has passed into the traditions of New Jersey. The more important persons present were Mayor Fagan, Record, Bacon, Carey, and Dickinson representing Jersey City; Tom McCarter, of the Public Service Corporation; and Randall Morgan of the U. G. I. The rooms were luxurious, the entertainment was good, and the conversation friendly and pleasant. When they got down to business, everybody felt as if they ought to be able to agree—everybody but Mark Fagan. He sat apart, cold and still. He says now that he felt at the time that he shouldn't have gone there at all, but that all the way over on the boat and during the conversation he was conning over just what he would say; that it was "not his business, but the city's, and that the case must go to the courts to decide." Tom McCarter spoke for the trolley, Carey for the city, and they got nowhere. Randall Morgan was talking tactfully to the mayor in a corner, when suddenly McCarter turned upon Mark and said:

"Well, Mr. Mayor, what is your decision?"

The mayor was ready. He had no decision to give, he said. Jersey City was going to take the case into court, and the courts would decide.

McCarter always loses his temper when opposed by an honest government. "You may be an honest man," he shouted at the mayor, "but you act like a blackmailer. And you, George Record, I'll never forgive you for letting me put my good money into this trolley company without telling me what you knew about it." He insulted them all, one by one, in turn, including Sam Dickinson, and then he made a famous threat to the whole party:

"To all of you I say, you can't bring your suit without the consent of the attorney general, and the attorney general is my brother."

No matter what an honest man in office tries to do, if he persists, he comes sooner or later upon the corrupt business back of corrupt politics. And no matter what kind of reform it undertakes, an honest city administration, if it proceeds logically, has to appeal sooner or later to the corrupt state government back of the corrupt city government. Mark Fagan had come, as we have seen, upon the trolley business, and when Tom McCarter pointed to his brother Robert at Trenton, he was showing the mayor of Jersey City where he must go next. And Mayor Fagan went where Tom McCarter pointed, and what Tom McCarter predicted happened. When Jersey City asked attorney general McCarter to take its expired franchise into court, Tom's brother, Robert, refused.

Thus Mark Fagan learned that the trolley was king of his state. And he was to learn that the railroad was queen. During this, his first administration, the mayor had been able, by simply

catching tax dodgers and “equalizing” the taxes of privileged individuals and corrupt corporations, to buy a site for a new high school; begin one school, finish another; put up eleven temporary schools, thus providing seats for all the children in the city; and make needed repairs in all the schools. He had built a free bath; established free dispensaries; extended one park, bought another, improved two more, and given free concerts in them all. He improved the fire, street-cleaning, and health departments, and he repaired and extended the sewerage system. But he wanted to do more, and he needed more money. How could he get it?

In the course of his investigations he discovered what well-informed persons long had known, that railroad property was taxed separately in New Jersey. We needn't go into figures. The point was, the railroads were taxed by a state board which they controlled, and which enabled them to fix their own valuation. Not only that, their tax rate, as fixed by law, was lower than the local rate on ordinary property. All localities suffered more or less, but in Jersey City, where the railroads needed much and the most valuable ground (waterfront), every time they bought property for railroad use, they not only paid less taxes on it than the private owner had paid, but they took it off the city list. The obvious effect was that the most valuable taxable property in the city constantly decreased and the tax on the rest has steadily increased and must forever increase.

It was a matter of life and death to Jersey City, to have this system changed, but the city was helpless alone. Mark Fagan, renominated, had to promise to go to Trenton with this business and with the trolley trouble. It was an exciting campaign. The railroads, the public service companies, the taxed corporations—all the corrupt and privileged interests set about beating Mark Fagan, but the mayor, going from house to house, and making, man to man, his simple promise to be “honest and true”—defeated the system.

Elected, he and his cabinet went to the legislature, and they had their bills introduced. Nothing came of a bill against Robert McCarter. A franchise tax measure was still-born. Their equal tax bill was crude, so the Democrats substituted a better one which the Jersey City Republicans accepted and supported. Referred to a committee, there were hearings on the bill, but it was buried there. The silent power of the king and the queen of the state would not let it come out.

Mark Fagan, with his staring eyes, saw that the government of his state, the control of his own party was in the hands of the most favoured men in and out of the state, those that corrupted it to get and keep privileges. And he wanted to say so. As the session drew to a close, he felt he must do something, but what? He must appeal from the state to the people of the state. How? Somebody suggested a letter to Governor Murphy, and they drew up one which described what Mark Fagan saw. The mayor wanted to publish it right away. Record objected that he “couldn't see the end of it.” The mayor said it was true; it was his duty to say it; and he wanted to “let the consequences go.” Record suggested showing it to Dickinson. The mayor said “no”; it is characteristic of him to avoid consulting those of his advisers who, he thinks, will oppose an act he believes to be right. Record did show it to Dickinson, however, and to his surprise the boss was for it. The Public Service crowd from Essex had beaten some political legislation of his, so the colonel, a vindictive man, was for revenge. Record advised one more appeal to Governor Murphy, and he thought that was agreed upon. And Governor Murphy, understanding that the letter was to be withheld, had a luncheon with the other leaders, who decided to do “anything you want.” Meanwhile, however, Fagan and Dickinson had handed to the reporters Fagan's famous letter to the Hon. Franklin Murphy, governor of New Jersey:

March 24, 1904.

*“MY DEAR SIR: As mayor of Jersey City and also a member of the Republican party, I venture to address to you this public communication in the hope of averting a possible calamity to Jersey City and almost certain disaster to the Republican party of New Jersey. The present session of the legislature is drawing to a close. Its record, on the whole, is bad and in some respects is disgraceful. Its control by corporation interests, in the assembly at least, has been absolute. For this condition the Republican party is responsible.*

*“The bills for equal taxation demanded by a practically unanimous public sentiment, in all New Jersey at least, have been buried in committee at the command of the railroad corporations, and every attempt to move them has been resisted by a solid Republican vote upon the test motions. The Republican majority has made no attempt to defend this action, and has thereby admitted that it cannot be defended. . . .*

*“Bills affecting Jersey City, notably several bills to empower the city to sell its surplus water to neighbouring communities, which it has supplied for twenty years, and which desire to renew contracts with us, have been buried in committee.*

*“A bill to ratify a water contract recently made between Jersey City and East Newark was introduced early in the session, and referred to the committee on boroughs, which committee still holds it. The bill was afterward introduced under another number, and re-referred to the committee on municipal corporations, where it still reposes.*

*“A bill to allow Jersey City to test the right to a trolley franchise, which we are advised by counsel has expired, has met a similar fate. Our most determined efforts to get these committees to act have been unavailing, because of the Republican members thereof, but we can get no satisfactory reason for, nor explanation of, this action. . . .*

*“What is the meaning of all this? The answer is plain. A Republican legislature is controlled by the railroad, trolley, and water corporations. And the interests of the people are being betrayed.*

*“While I charge no man with personal corruption, I do not hesitate to say that this is a condition of affairs which is essentially corrupt, and which, if unchecked, means the virtual control of our state and our party by corporations.*

*“As a citizen I say that this condition is dangerous and demoralizing. As a public official I protest against this injustice done to Jersey City. As a member of the Republican party I deplore its subserviency to corporate greed and injustice. No political party can long receive the support of the people with such a record as this Republican legislature is making. . . .”*

Whatever form the issue takes upon which an honest man in politics makes his first fight, if he fights on, he finally will come to the real American issue: representative government. He may start out like Mayor Fagan for good government, or like Folk to prosecute boodlers, or like President Roosevelt to regulate railroad rates; before he gets through, he will have to ask the people to answer the question: “Who is to rule the disinterested majority or the specially interested, corrupt few?” And to make their answer, the people have to beat the boss, who is the agent of the businesses that rule and are destroying representative democracy.

Mayor Fagan’s letter to Governor Murphy raised the great question in New Jersey. It took at first the form that the gentle mayor of Jersey City had given it, railroad taxation. The railroads tried to keep it down. Governor Murphy appointed a commission to inquire into the need of a change in railroad tax methods, but the Republicans nominated for governor Edward C. Stokes, who resigned a directorship of a branch of the Pennsylvania Railroad to run, and the issue of the

campaign was the Jersey City issue. And Stokes was elected, but he had had to promise, and public opinion and the outrageous facts forced from the commission a report for some change. And “some change” was made; enough to relieve Jersey City, but not enough to hurt the railroads.

The people of Jersey saw that the railroads drew that law, that the railroads dominated still their state government, the railroads and the Public Service Corporation. For, besides the railroad legislation, the Jersey City men continued their franchise tax fight. And, meanwhile, Tom McCarter had aroused the people of Essex County to resist his perpetual franchise “grabs” in the Oranges. Jersey City wanted to tax franchises; Essex reformers were for limiting them. Record saw that they both were fighting one enemy and he advised a union, and, because he was wiser than the Essex leaders, he and Fagan took up their neighbors’ less essential issue. Everett Colby, a young Republican assemblyman from Essex, led the fight for limited franchises. He was beaten but the defeat showed what the state government represented.

So they went home to raise the real question. Fagan and Record to Jersey City, Colby and the Orange men to Essex. The Orange men had seen that Carl Lentz, the Republican boss of Essex County, who ruled them at home, was the agent, at Trenton, of the railroads and of the Public Service Corporation. They went after him. Lentz declared that Colby should not go back to the legislature; since he represented the people, not the corporations, he should not be renominated. But Assemblyman Colby said he not only would go back; he would go back as a senator, and he would take his nomination and his election from the people. Fortunately, George L. Record, far-sighted, practical reformer that he is, had engineered through the legislature a primary election law. The people had a chance to control their parties, and the Republicans of Essex went to the primaries, and they turned the party over to Everett Colby. Then the whole people of Essex turned in, and they elected Colby senator and with him, a solid assembly delegation pledged to represent the public interests.

And Jersey City did likewise. After Dickinson and his mayor had given out the Murphy letter, the railroad-trolley rings went after the boss, and they got him. He began to insist in Jersey City upon some sort of compromise with the Public Service Corporation. The company wanted some new grants. The city couldn’t get its old case into court; so what was the use of fighting? Why not settle it all out of court? Mayor Fagan hung back, but his cabinet persuaded him to talk it over with Tom McCarter. McCarter called, asking for perpetual franchises. The mayor was willing to negotiate on the basis of a twenty-five- year franchise. McCarter said limited franchises were absurd in Jersey. There they stuck till Record suggested, as a compromise, a perpetual franchise with readjustments of the terms every twenty-five years. McCarter thought this opened a way to a settlement; so did the mayor; and Dickinson, feeling that he had “delivered his man” (the mayor), sailed for Europe. But it wasn’t settled. McCarter demanded fifty-year periods, and the mayor, who had had misgivings all along, broke off the negotiations. The Public Service had its way. The Democrats controlled the Street and Water Board, and they passed McCarter’s franchise for him.

But it was passed over the mayor’s veto, and when Dickinson came home to hear that not his party but the Democrats had sold out to the Public Service, and that he was left, as before, in the ridiculous position of boss who couldn’t deliver his mayor, he was angry. And all through the next session he opposed the legislation asked for by his city. He joined the other bosses against the people, and, like Lentz, Dickinson went home to beat “his man” for renomination. Like Everett Colby, Mark Fagan accepted the challenge; he received the nomination for mayor from the Republicans direct and he took the organization besides. Then he turned to the people with this appeal:

“I find myself, at the opening of the campaign, confronted by a threefold opposition. First, that of the Democratic machine and its absolute boss; second, the scarcely concealed and treacherous opposition of a Republican party leader, whose demands in behalf of his corporate clients I have refused to grant; third, the secret but powerful opposition of a combination of public service and railroad corporations, whose unjust corporate privileges are threatened by my reelection. The opposition of the corporations and the reasons therefor, and the close business relations between them and the Democratic boss are well understood by the public. The relations between these corporations, or some of them, and the Republican boss, are not so well known. I explicitly charge that this Republican leader is doing everything in his power to defeat my reelection; that his efforts to that end are jeopardizing the whole Republican ticket; and that this action is in the interest of the public service and railroad corporations. . . .

“These facts, and many others too numerous to mention, have convinced me that it is time to come out in the open and have a square stand-up fight against the Republican boss, the Democratic boss, and the trolley and railroad corporations which control them both. It is impossible for a public official to get along permanently with a boss, except upon terms of abject obedience and the sacrifice of self-respect. Personally I am tired of the experiment. I am sick of talk of party harmony, which means surrender of personal independence and of popular rights. It is time to fight the boss system itself, by which unscrupulous men get between the people and the public officials by control of the party machinery, betray the people, acquire riches for themselves, and attempt to drive out of public life all who will not take orders from the boss, and his real masters, the corporations.”

So the fight that fall, in Jersey City, as in Essex County and in New York, as in Toledo and Cincinnati, and Cleveland and Philadelphia, and in Ohio and in Pennsylvania, was a fight against the bosses. And as in those places, so in Jersey City, the people crossed all party lines to follow the leader, and they beat the bosses. Mark Fagan was reelected mayor of Jersey City, and he and Senator Colby and the reformers of Jersey combined against the interests which the bosses represented.

But never mind Jersey! What of Mark Fagan, the man who by following the facts, without a theory of reform, by tackling each obstacle as he approached it, came out upon the truth and gave his state its issues and aroused it finally to take part in the second war for independence that is waging all over this country? I have told simply the simple story of this simple man. The mystery remains. Why did Mark Fagan do it? That is what they ask in Jersey City, and that is what the commercial spirit of this Christian land asks of Folk and La Follette and Tom Johnson. What prompted them to do something for others? What are they after? What is there in it for them? And how and why do they win?

His bitterest foes—the grafters—concede Fagan’s honesty. “Bob” Davis was the only one that offered any doubts on that point, and he offered them to me; he had none of his own. Pressed for facts, he admitted that Fagan was “personally on the square.” The bigger grafters said Fagan was a demagogue. This is ridiculous. He addresses no prejudices, stirs no passions, makes no appeal to class; he seems to have no sense of class. His talks, like his speeches, are so plain that the wonder is that they count as they do count, winning for him, a Republican, a majority in a Democratic city. I asked the politicians to explain it. Mark has a relative, Jimmy Connolly, once a saloon-keeper, always a hard-headed politician. When Mr. Record confessed he could not account for it he referred me to Jimmy Connolly, and I asked Connolly:

“How does Mark Fagan do it?”

“You can search me,” said he. “I’ve watched him, and I’ve listened to him, and I give it up. And you can ast anybody in this town; we’ve all ast ourselves and that is where you’ll end up. You’ll ast yourself. I don’t know what he says, and I’ve listened to him, but he doesn’t say nothing. Leastways, if you or the likes of me said to a fellar what Mark says, I can just hear the fellar say, ‘Say, what ye givin’ me, what?’ ‘Say,’ he’d say, ‘haven’t ye got th’ price of a drink in your clothes?’ But when Mark says it, what he says, they fall down to it like dead soldiers. Nope, you got to find that out for yerself.”

And an idea struck him, “Maybe you can,” he said. “Now, maybe you can. I’ll get a wagon and we’ll go chase Mark out to the railroad yards, and you’ll listen to him yerself, and maybe you can tell me.”

Out to the yards we went, and we joined the mayor. He was going up to a group of men, who stopped work, wiped their hands on their clothes, and formed a shy group. “I’m Mark Fagan,” said the mayor as shyly. “I have tried to serve you honestly and faithfully. I don’t know how well, but you know my record. That’s the way to judge a man, by his record. And if you don’t understand anything in it, I’d like to have you ask me about it. If you think I have done right in most things, I’d like to have your support.”

That was all. They shook hands, saying nothing, and he moved on.

“Understand that?” said Connelly at my elbow. “Every one of ’em’ll vote for him. Why? What’s there to it?”

Mark climbed up into the switch tower and began: “I am Mark Fagan—”

“You needn’t waste your time here,” said the tower man, looking around steadily. “I know you’re Mark Fagan, and I know what you’re doing. And I’ll vote for you till hell freezes over.” He flung over the switch, and Mark retreated, abashed.

“He knows me,” he said wonderingly to me when he came down. Of course they all know the mayor, but the mayor can’t call them by name; he hasn’t a good memory for either names or faces, and I saw him talk to men he had talked to before. So there is no flattery, and no familiarity, and that was one point which missed Connolly, who couldn’t understand why those men didn’t laugh or josh the mayor. “Why don’t they give him a song and dance?” he said.

One man in a group I joined before the mayor reached it did say he was going to “have some fun with Mark,” and the others in a mood for horse play, dared the bold one to ask Fagan for “the price of a drink.” I thought the man would, but when Mark came up, saying, “I am Mark Fagan; I have been mayor for two terms, and I have tried to serve you,” etc., etc., the bold man was silent; they were all respectful, and the psychology was plain enough.

The mayor speaks, what Connolly calls “his little piece,” with dignity, with the grave dignity of self-respect, and you feel, and those men feel, the perfect sincerity of Mark Fagan.

But that didn’t satisfy Jim Connolly, and it wouldn’t satisfy anybody in Jersey City. It didn’t satisfy me, and since nobody else could help me, I went to Mark himself. I went to his home with him, and I asked him questions. He squirmed, and it wasn’t pleasant for me; but I had a theory I wanted to test. Maybe it wasn’t right to probe thus into the soul of a man, and maybe it isn’t fine to show what you see. It hurt Mark Fagan, that interview, and the report of it will hurt more. But I am thinking of those of us who need to see what I saw when I looked in upon the soul of Mark Fagan.

Why had he done the things that had been done for Jersey City? That was the main question. He said he hadn’t done those things, not alone. His cabinet had done them. He gave full credit to his associates, and he gave it honestly, as if he wished to be believed. But, as Record

says, whatever of knowledge and resources he and the rest contributed to the mayor, it was the mayor who furnished the courage, the steady will—the transparent character.

“What is your purpose, Mr. Mayor?”

He elaborated his idea of making Jersey City pleasant. He talked about clean streets, good water and light service, and schools. “Now the schools—I think the schools shouldn’t be shut up when school is out. Don’t you think it would be nice if the mothers could go there, and the girls, and learn to sew and other things? I’d like to have a gymnasium in the schools; and a swimming tank. The schools ought to be the place where the people of the neighborhood go to read and hear lectures, and hold meetings, and for the children to play. Do you think that is foolish?”

“He hadn’t read of the efforts elsewhere for these ends. He was glad to know his scheme had struck others as feasible.

“I don’t see why things shouldn’t be useful, like that, and pretty. Do you think it would be foolish I haven’t talked about this to the others, but do you think it would be so foolish to have flowers in the schools?”

“Why do you care about other people?” I asked. “You seem to like men. Do you really?”

His look answered that, but he went on to talk about his boyhood and his experiences as an undertaker. These would make anybody like the people, he thought.

“What do you mean by the people?” I asked. “The poor people? The working people? When you address a crowd, do you appeal to labor as labor, to the unions, for example?”

“Oh, no. I never do that. I mean everybody. The poor need the most, and most people over here work, but by people I mean men and women and children, everybody.”

“Railroad presidents? Do you hate the railroads?”

“No,” he said, reflecting. “They do a good deal that is wrong. They corrupt young men, and they don’t care anything about Jersey City. They should stop corrupting politics, but you can’t expect them to look out for us. We must do that.” He paused. “I have hated men, almost, some of these corporation men, but I don’t any more. I used to hate men that said things about me that weren’t true, that weren’t just. But I’ve got over that now.”

“How did you get over it?”

“I have a way,” he said, evidently meaning not to tell it.

“You must have been tempted often in the four years you have been in office. Have you ever been offered a bribe?”

“Only once, but that was by a man sent by somebody else. He didn’t know what he was doing, and I didn’t blame him so much as I did those who sent him.”

“But the subtler temptations, how did you resist them?” “I have a way,” he said, again.

This time I pressed him for it; he evaded the point, and I urged that if he knew a way, and a good way, to resist political temptations, others should know of it.

He was most uncomfortable. “It’s a good way,” he said, looking down. Then, looking up, he almost whispered: “I pray. When I take an oath of office, I speak it slowly. I say each word, thinking how it is an oath, and afterward I pray for strength to keep it.”

“A silent prayer?”

“Yes.”

“And that helps? Against the daily temptations too?”

“Yes, but I—every morning when I go up the steps of City Hall, I ask that I may be given to recognize temptations when they come to me, and to resist them. And at night, I go over every act and I give thanks if I have done no injury to any man.”

“When you were considering whether you would give out that letter to Governor Murphy, why did you say, ‘Let the consequences go’?”

“Well, when anything is to be done that I think is right, and the rest say it might hurt my political career, I ask myself if such thoughts are tempting me, and if I think they are, I do that thing quick. That was the way of the Murphy letter.”

“They say you want to be governor of New Jersey.”

“I know that I don’t.” he said quietly. “I have asked myself that, and I know that I don’t. I don’t think that I would be able to be the governor; I mean, able to do much for people in that high office.”

“What do you want to do, then?”

“Why, what I am doing now.”

“Always? Do you mean that you’d like to be mayor of Jersey City all your life?”

He looked up as if I had caught him at some thing foolish or extravagant, but he answered:

“If I could be—if I could go on doing things for the people all my life, as mayor, I should be very happy. But I can’t, I suppose, so I shall be satisfied to have done so well that whoever comes after me can’t do badly without the people noticing it.”

“Well, what do you get out of serving others, Mr. Mayor? Try to tell me that truly.”

He did try. “I am getting to be a better man. You know I’m a Catholic.”

“Yes, and some people say the Catholics are against the public schools. Why have you done so much for them?”

He was surprised. “I am mayor of all the people, and the schools are good for the people.”

“Well, you were saying that you are a Catholic—”

“Yes, and I go to confession ever so often. I try to have less to confess each time, and I find that I have. Gradually, I am getting to be a better man. What I told you about hating men that were unfair to me shows. Some of them were very unfair; from hating them I’ve got so that I don’t feel anything but sorry for them, that they can’t understand how I’m trying to be right and just to everybody. Maybe some day I will be able to like them.”

“Like them also! What is it, Mr. Mayor, altruism or selfishness? Is it love for your neighbour or the fear of God that moves you?”

He thought long and hard, and then he was “afraid it was the fear of God.”

“What is your favourite book, Mr. Mayor?”

“‘The Imitation of Christ.’ Did you ever read it? I read a little in it, anywhere, every day.”

I wouldn’t tell Jimmy Connolly, nor “Bob” Davis, nor Sam Dickinson, nor, to their faces, could I say it to many men in Jersey City; I’d rather write than speak it anywhere in this hard, selfish world of ours, but I do believe I understand Mark Fagan, how he makes men believe in him, why he wants to: The man is a Christian, a literal Christian; no mere member of a church, but a follower of Christ; no patron of organized charities, but a giver of kindness, sympathy, love. Like a disciple, he has carried “the greatest of these “ out into the streets, through the railroad yards, up to the doors of the homes and factories, where he has knocked, offering only service, honest and true, even in public office. And that is why he is the marvel of a “Christian” community in the year of our Lord, 1909. And, believe me, that is how and why Mark some day will make his Jersey City “pretty.” This gentle man has found a way to solve his problems, and ours, graft, railroad rates and the tariff. There may be other ways, but, verily, if we loved our

neighbour as ourselves we would not then betray and rob and bribe him. Impracticable? It does sound so -- I wonder why? -- to Christian ears. And maybe we are wrong; maybe Christ was right. Certainly Mark Fagan has proved that the Christianity of Christ not as the scholars "interpret" it, but as the Nazarene taught it, and as you and I and the mayor of Jersey City can understand it -- Christianity, pure and simple, is a force among men and -- a happiness. Anyhow, that is all there is to the mystery of Mark Fagan; that is what he means.