As the Pingree second term waned the question of a successor to him began to seize all concerned. The political pendulum had been pushed by Governor Pingree as far as it would go in the reform direction and was already starting on a reverse oscillation. The McMillan machine had received a jolt that made it rickety. The railroads, between which and the McMillan bund there had been a partial truce, always sufficient in effect before the election of Governor Pingree to protect the transportation interests in the legislature and control the appointment of the railroad commissioner, had been badly shaken up. At the same time, the Pingree organization had been flawed by the state militia exposures. It is always the case that political chaos produces numerous candidates. The mixed conditions during the last year of the second term of Governor Pingree did not prove an exception to this. Probably the McMillan machine showed the most vitality and best cohesiveness. While it failed to beat Alger with Ferry it easily defeated Albert Pack for United States Senator with Julius Caesar Burrows.

Senator Stockbridge, who died in office, was succeeded by John Patton, of Grand Rapids. Governor Rich often showed signs of independence, and this appointment of Mr. Patton was an instance. When the brief term served by Senator Patton expired, his place was taken by J. C. Burrows, of Kalamazoo. This result was a perfect mirror of existing political conditions. John Patton was a citizen of unusual strength. He was a lawyer, a man of culture and force, independent and courageous, desired only the best and acted upon well considered convictions. Naturally, he could not be handled willy nilly. The politicians and interests
had no manner of use for him because they could not use him. Politics appeared to be a question of profit of some kind for nearly everybody. Some one more bidable than John Patton was wanted in the national Senate. Mr. Burrows, then for some time in the House of Representatives, was selected as the man. Delos Blodgett, a wealthy lumberman of Grand Rapids, forgot the amenities that are supposed to subsist between fellow citizens, in the desire that submerged him to have some one who would vote right on the lumber tariff and other things. Mr. Blodgett sought and obtained the McMillan vehicle, which was not difficult, because James McMillan, the senior senator, did not look pleasantly upon a junior senator of superior culture, who would not play second fiddle to him. The machine worked so well that Mr. Patton got the guillotine expeditiously. It worked quite as well against Albert Pack, who had lined up with the Pingree forces and tried with their aid to beat Senator Burrows, after his first term. I had impotently supported both Patton and Pack.

With these scalps in their belt the McMillanites quite confidently trotted out D. M. Ferry, of Detroit, as a successor to Pingree. Aaron T. Bliss, of Saginaw, had the Alger-Ledyard railroad support. I was offered the support of one wing of the Pingree following, including that of Justus S. Stearns, of Ludington, then secretary of state. It was not long after he had urged me to become a candidate for governor and had pledged his support to me, before he decided as was his right, that he would be a candidate himself. This was the result of influence upon him by the Pingree wing that was not for me. It was the mercenary gang, and was stronger than the other following. Nevertheless, inasmuch as I had made my announcement, I stuck to my colors.

James O’Donnell, of Jackson, a newspaper man of standing and ability, who had been in the house of representatives and also had been a candidate for governor several times before, announced himself.

Lastly, the commissioner of insurance under Governor Pingree, Milo D. Campbell, of Coldwater, became a candidate. This made six candidates for governor to succeed Pingree. Three of
them, Bliss, Ferry and Stearns were by reputation multi-millionaires. The other three, O’Donnell, Campbell and myself were comparatively poor men. I was youngest of all and, as I view things now, I was not qualified to be governor, although I am, even after sixteen years, unconvinced that I was not as well equipped as any of the others, which is not an immodest tribute to myself.

There ensued the wildest use of money in politics that had ever occurred in the State. Such a fight as Ferry, Bliss and Stearns put up had never been witnessed before. The serpent of corruption made a slimy trail all over the State, and debauched and debauchers could be tracked by the spoor of dollars. When the thing got hot, delegates were offered three thousand dollars for a single vote, and perhaps more. Friends of mine witnessed an offer of two thousand, five hundred dollars to a delegate favorable to me, and saw him refuse in anger. That honest man is Gilman M. Dame, since then for a time chairman of the Republican state central committee of Michigan. That act explains the origin of my friendship for him that began then and has subsisted without a break to the present time.

I made a red-hot personal canvass as far and as fast as I could go. With no money to spend I was not tempted to spend any. O’Donnell and Campbell were in the same moneyless boat so far as concerned ability to compete with Ferry, Bliss and Stearns. My stock in trade was my political and administrative record up to date. As state game and fish warden I had done my best at every turn and had really gotten results. As commissioner of railroads I had enforced two-cent passenger fare laws for the first time in the history of the State; had clung to a policy of grade separation consistently and doggedly, only to see it die when I went out of office and remain unresurrected to this time—and had done all the law required and quite a good deal more.

My grade separation work had just been tragically emphasized by an accident at Flint, in which Major Buckingham, Mrs. Applegate and Mrs. Humphrey had been killed. Application had been made for a certain grade crossing at Flint. The hearing was
attended by a large number of citizens of that town, including Major Buckingham. That gallant gentleman had abused me roundly when I decided against those who desired the unopposed request. Special legislation was sought and obtained, reversing my decision in effect. The grade crossing was put in, and within a short time afterwards Major Buckingham and his guests were killed upon it.

The grade crossing policy caused more friction than anything else during my administration of the railroad commissioner's department. It was an active era of electric road construction. Very frequently indeed there was trouble over crossings between steam and electric roads. I was called upon almost continuously to grant hearings, at which appeared the best lawyers of the State and many capitalists. One incident discovered to me how the situation might be made extraordinarily profitable by one so inclined.

I had made a decision requiring six grade separations to cost ten thousand dollars each, a total of sixty thousand dollars. The electric road builder who would have to do this work called upon me in my office early one forenoon, before the separation orders had been issued. After preliminaries he said he had come to "lose thirty thousand dollars under the carpet of my office."

For just a moment I really did not understand him, but in the next half second it flashed to my mind that he was trying to bribe me. It was probably the play for me, according to the story books, to be insulted and knock my tempter down and throw him out, or do some such dramatic stunt. But I only saw the humor of the thing and told him that if the money was lost under the carpet the janitor would find it after a while and return it, but he would lose the interest.

Disgusted with what he appeared to think was my stupidity, he soon departed.

It was the only time in my life that I have been offered a bribe. He was going to split fifty-fifty with me and not separate the grades. A lot of money to me was thirty thousand dollars, but it required no accession of honesty to refuse it; in fact it was not
even a temptation, and I did not seem to get for myself from it any real measure of my true character.

The charm of the governorship campaign was the attitude towards me of certain personal friends and particularly of my home town and county, and the entire Upper Peninsula. I had every Upper Peninsula county behind me except Luce. The two delegates from Luce County were controlled for Stearns by Con Danaher, a fellow lumberman. In the Lower Peninsula I did not have much support, but it was more than enough to offset the loss of Luce.

The convention deadlocked, but not for long. The Ferry forces decided early that they were beaten. They caucused. Their leaders saw they might dictate the nomination by throwing to O'Donnell or to me. In a vote between us I lost by two. If the Ferry delegates had come to me I would in all probability have been nominated, because I had a large second choice following, that would have come to me on the break that followed. Power above man pilots destiny. Bliss was nominated.

I have always thought that James O'Donnell joked himself away from serious consideration. He was a fine man. In public he was a monologist, and came to be regarded as a funny entertainer. This threw a curtain over his soldier merits. Ecclesiastes: “Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savor; so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honor.”

Defeat for nomination as governor at the Grand Rapids convention did not in the least discourage me. On the contrary it opened my eyes. The three contesting millionaires had spent three quarters of a million dollars. Disgust was written as large in the State as shame had been. It is as though the individual is a phagocyte and sustains the same relation to the great body politique as that bacillus does to the human body. When a sickness threatens death they are stimulated as never before to work to save it.

I shared in the common desire for better and cleaner things. This was intense enough within me to cause me to decide that I
would get out of politics and remain out until I could participate as an independent.

There were only two ways then, and that is all there are now, by which a man could become a candidate. One was as the creature of interested persons, and the other was upon one's own initiative as an independent. In fact, the latter way offered the only possible chance for freedom in public service. I could not see how a poor man could be wholly independent under our political systems and conditions then, and cannot now. The thing then for me to do, I decided, was to make enough money to be independent and to make it by methods so honest that I could not reproach myself, or be assailed by an opponent or an enemy. It took me twelve years to do it.

My next decision was to reenter politics, or at least to offer to serve, and particularly to expose and oppose all forms of political corrupt practice. My happiness was not to be found in holding office, but in work of any kind and in any and all directions, so far as my power went, that would help mankind. Nor could I convince myself that I was unselfish, because I soon found that there is more joy in offering to serve and in conscientiously doing one's best when opportunity comes. I was after that sweetness.

Upon all sides I saw the hardness and the misery and the discontent of wealth. Strong men would phlebotomize everybody they could, and then in an anguish of remorse, seek happiness as professional philanthropists through channels of belated restoration, only to gather disappointment and increased bitterness.

Somewhere between too much and too little is the economic Utopia that Solomon quotes Agur, the son of Jakeh, as praying for when he asks: “Give me neither poverty nor riches.”

That also became my prayer. I was thus, I think, prevented from having an incurable case of money grubbing. When my possessions got to the fairly certain value of two hundred fifty thousand dollars, I diverted all my strength to public service in any way that gave me a chance.