

# A COUNTY WHERE SELLING VOTES IS UNIVERSAL

## Even the Women of Adams County, Ohio, Market the Ballots of Their Husbands, Sons and Sweethearts---A Minister Among the Guilty.



Four Prisoners Charged with Selling Their Votes.

ADAMS COUNTY, Ohio, trying to purge itself of hoodlums, is taking medicine in allopathic doses. For twenty-five years votes of citizens have been bought and sold openly. Without shame, husbands and fathers have stood at the street corners and bartered their votes to the highest bidder. Now comes the awakening. Having had no respect for the most potent right of the American citizen—his vote—the awakening was slow in coming, but now that the civic conscience has at last been aroused, voters by the hundreds are flocking in to admit their guilt and receive punishment.

For years Adams County has been a community with a double conscience. But no more. Ballot debauchery now is a thing of the past. By admitting that they had sold their honor as American citizens for the boodle of dirty politics, and by baring their dishonor to public view, voters feel that they can wipe the slate clean and begin life anew politically. And Judge A. Z. Blair, who started the boodle investigation, is helping them. He is the one who is applying the allopathic remedy. This consists of a sentence of disfranchisement for five years for each guilty citizen.

After a period of five years without the right of exercising their voting power the hoodlums, Judge Blair thinks, will have come to understand the sacredness of the ballot and will no longer have a double conscience. Already disfranchised voters find embarrassment in the fact that they are barred from the polls and are placed in the same class with the felon. For these people who played fast and loose with their honors as doctors, lawyers, ministers, merchants, farmers, mechanics, honest, God-fearing men who attended church regularly, assisted the poor, and were scrupulously honest in business did not prevent them from refusing to go to the polls until they had been paid their price—generally \$10.

Even the women are numbered among the hoodlums who have made the rest of the country look aghast at the enormity of corruption that has opened here. Mothers have sold the votes of sons and husbands, sisters have bartered away the suffrage of their brothers and fathers, and even sweethearts have put up for auction the votes of their swains. In a walk past the dingy stores that surround the Public Square of West Union, the county seat, every man you meet has been implicated in the sordid betrayal of the Commonwealth.

With the Grand Jury working almost day and night, fully 1,500 voters have been indicted, more than a third of the voting population has been disfranchised, five men sent to the workhouse, and \$25,000 in fines collected. Only those who have sold their votes have been indicted. A number of politicians have obtained immunity by giving evidence against the men whose votes they bought. There are still a few politicians, men "higher up," who have not figured in the investigation, and Judge Blair and the Grand Jury are expected to get after them before the inquiry is ended.

As a result of so many voters being disfranchised, some townships will be unable to elect officers. In two townships every voter has been disfranchised. Judge Blair will make special arrangements so that provision may be made for the executive branches of the governments of these communities.

Adams County is the most rural of any in Ohio. It is a county of rolling hills, winding valleys, and little hamlets. West Union is the only county seat in the State that has neither a railroad nor a telegraph station. To reach it one must drive fourteen miles over the hills.

The setting is one for a pastoral play, not for the tragedy that has been enacted here. The people are good, with one kink in their consciences which permits them to boodle at elections. They are church-going and temperate. Adams voted "dry" seven years ago, and has remained so ever since.

The air in Adams County is clean and bracing. The stars shine larger there in the frosty winter nights than they do in the cities. Men live close to the soil. It seems like a place set apart for the good things in life, but it is the rottenest borough in the civilized world.

The country folk there are simple. The men wear faded blue shirts, felt boots, and slouch hats. They drive little buggies through the country. They look innocent. But they do like to boodle.

The county sent more soldiers to the civil war than any other in the State. It was a center of the "Underground Railroad"; slaves were ferried across the yellow Ohio River and were hidden in the log farm houses until they could be sent on by moonlight toward the North and freedom.

ty buying votes. The traffic was a secret one then, done in whispers and in the dark. Votes sold for \$1. Elections came and were bought. The citizens had a taste of boodle money and they liked it. In the 80s elections became more openly corrupt. Politicians still talk about the "good times" of the 1887 election. That year Ed P. Leedom and Ed Silcutt, two Federal office holders, came from Washington with a carpet bag full of bank notes. Thirty thousand dollars was spent to carry Adams County Democratic that year.

"I rode out of the county after election that year with Leedom and Silcutt and they still had unopened packages of money which I saw," said S. S. Alexander, one of the old residents. He ran for County Treasurer on the Republican ticket that year and was defeated.

Those were the days of the separate ballot boxes. When a vote was bought the seller was escorted to the ballot box

by the buyer. Then the money was paid. Prices of votes rose, but the introduction of the Australian ballot system put a check to the traffic—for one year. Then a Democratic leader, more ingenious than his fellows, invented a way to "beat" it. The voter was told to place his ballot over a large envelope which was given to him while marking it. He gave the envelope to the buyer. Inside of it was a sheet of carbon paper over a fac-simile of the official ballot. The marking of the ballot marked the duplicate, so that the purchase could be checked.

Early in the 90s a condition arose that has continued until the present day. Candidates were drafted to fill the tickets and then bled systematically for "slush funds" until after the election. Party workers met a few days before the primaries and decided what men could be induced to go on the tickets. Possession of money and willingness to spend it was the sole qualification.

Once a man had been marked to be the spender, every possible influence was brought to bear on him. His minister would call on him, his banker would urge him, his friends would beseech him not to forsake them. Once consent was obtained the bleeding began.

Assessment was made on the basis of all the traffic would bear. From \$500 to \$1,000 would be collected and then further assessments would be made until the salaries of the offices had gone for campaign expenses.

The stories of past campaigns are told, with names by the actors in them. The stories, for pure civic turpitude, would make a burglar turn pale with envy, but the matter of fact way in which they are related is astounding. One of these citizens who unblushingly tells of his boodle experience is perhaps the wealthiest man in the county. He is certainly the most influential. He was willing to talk if his name were not used.

"Frequently I handle \$10,000 in an election," he said coolly. "It is the only way you can carry an election here. I back candidates as other men back races. It's fun to win. Wrong? It is the only way, I tell you. The voters demand money. They won't vote unless they get it. The politicians welcome this investigation. We don't want to spend so much money."

This man told how a committeeman had received \$300 in new notes to take to an outlying precinct. An hour after he left West Union he returned. His hat was dented and his clothes were muddy. He had been robbed, he said. Next week the committeeman paid off a note in new bills. Nothing ever was done about it.

The leader described the methods of buying votes in a way that was a revelation as to his point of view. He made no bones about it. That is the incomprehensible thing outsiders have found in talking to the hoodlums.

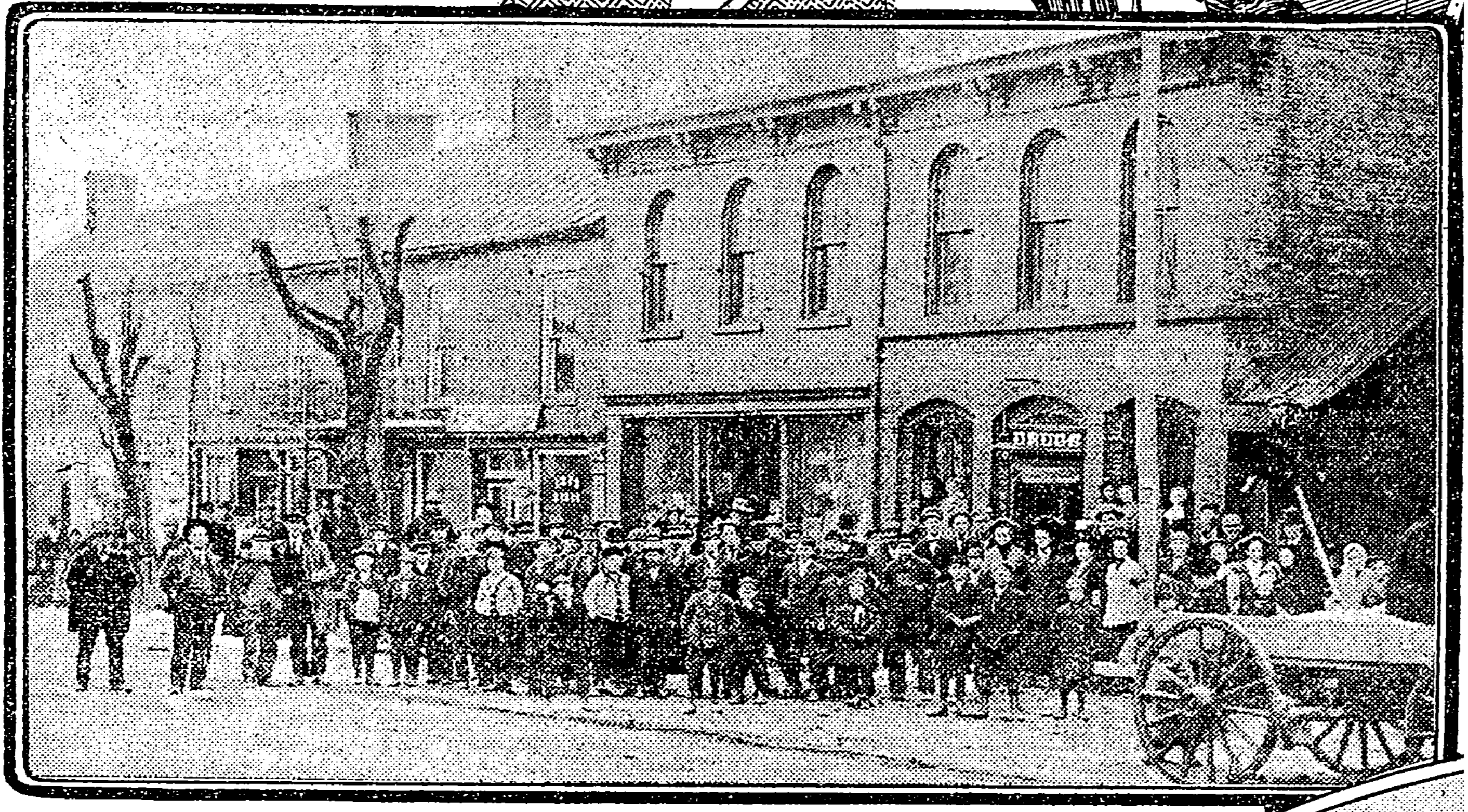
One man is responsible for starting off



Voteseller Paying His Fine.

One of the leaders in the vote-buying movement sums up the situation in the following way: "Adams County people, the men who have been selling their votes for years and the men who have been buying them are not bad at heart. They are simple minded, home-loving, and honest in everything except voting. Fewer residents of Adams County break the general laws of the State than the people of other counties. Every law except the election law is respected. The county jail, many months in the year, is empty. The farmer leaves his doors unlocked. He knows his neighbors. Farming is the chief industry, and it is the ambition of every man of family to give his children the best education possible. Adams County produces more school teachers than any other county in

cities and other places they have never seen. At the missionary meetings some of them will weep over the sufferings of the heathen in foreign lands, and contribute some of the coin they gathered in election day to send Christian representatives to the dark places on the globe. In the Summer they will take care of the "fresh air" children sent out of the stifling Cincinnati tenements. They believe in God, study the Bible, but they have been in the habit of refusing to vote unless they are paid." Some of the sturdy citizens of Adams County have not come to a realization of their wrong doing. Recently scores of vote vendors flocked to Judge Blair's court to confess voluntarily their part in the bribery scandal. These men hoped that by admitting their crime they would save for them-



Street Scene in Peables, Adams County, Ohio.

the ill. He is Judge Blair, presiding Judge of the Common Pleas Court. Blair is a man of Adams County, brought up in the Southern part of the State. His life has been interwoven with the political history of this part of the State.

"I was born on a farm near Highland, Ohio, Dec. 13, 1861," he said recently when questioned as to the hoodling and his part in stopping it. "That is in Jackson County, just across the border from Adams. I went to the country schools, and when a young man moved across the border to this city. Here I studied law. That was about twenty years ago, and the hoodling had already begun in this county."

"I have seen the Mayor of West Union, the prosecuting attorney, and other officials watch a farmer's vote auctioned. He stood on a soap box in the Public Square and the politicians bid against one another."

"When I was Chairman of the Democratic Committee frequently we made agreements to have clean elections. But, while we might have one clean election, the hoodlums would kick over the traces the next year."

"These people down here, many of them, do not realize they are doing wrong when they sell their votes. It is a custom. They won't go to the polls unless they are paid."

"When I was a young fellow, anxious to get ahead, I bought some votes. But I always felt mean when I did it, and I made up my mind I would break up the practice, and I'm going to if I have to disfranchise every voter in the county."

Judge Blair has an interesting personality. He is awkward, thin, bowed. He dresses like other Adams County men. His actions are quick. Eagerness is in every move of him. The index to his character is seen in his face. It is the face of a fox, cunning, alert, wary. His hair, growing white now, frames his face. It is kept short cropped. He peers through his thick glasses seeking to penetrate to the thoughts of anyone with whom he converses. In reading he holds his paper not more than three inches from his eyes.

No other man is feared in Adams County as is Judge Blair. His record for severity on the bench is proverbial. He killed boot-legging in Seloto County; he threw out the gamblers and the scariet women. He is a leading figure in Anti-saloon League work.



Curious Crowds Waiting for Votesellers to Come and pay Their Fines.

of seven Democrats, seven Republicans, and one Prohibitionist. The foreman is Lucien J. Penton of Winchester, Ohio. Fenton served in the Fifty-fourth and Fifty-fifth Congresses as a Republican member. He is a close personal friend of Senator Burton of Ohio, and, indeed, resembles the Senator in dress and appearance.

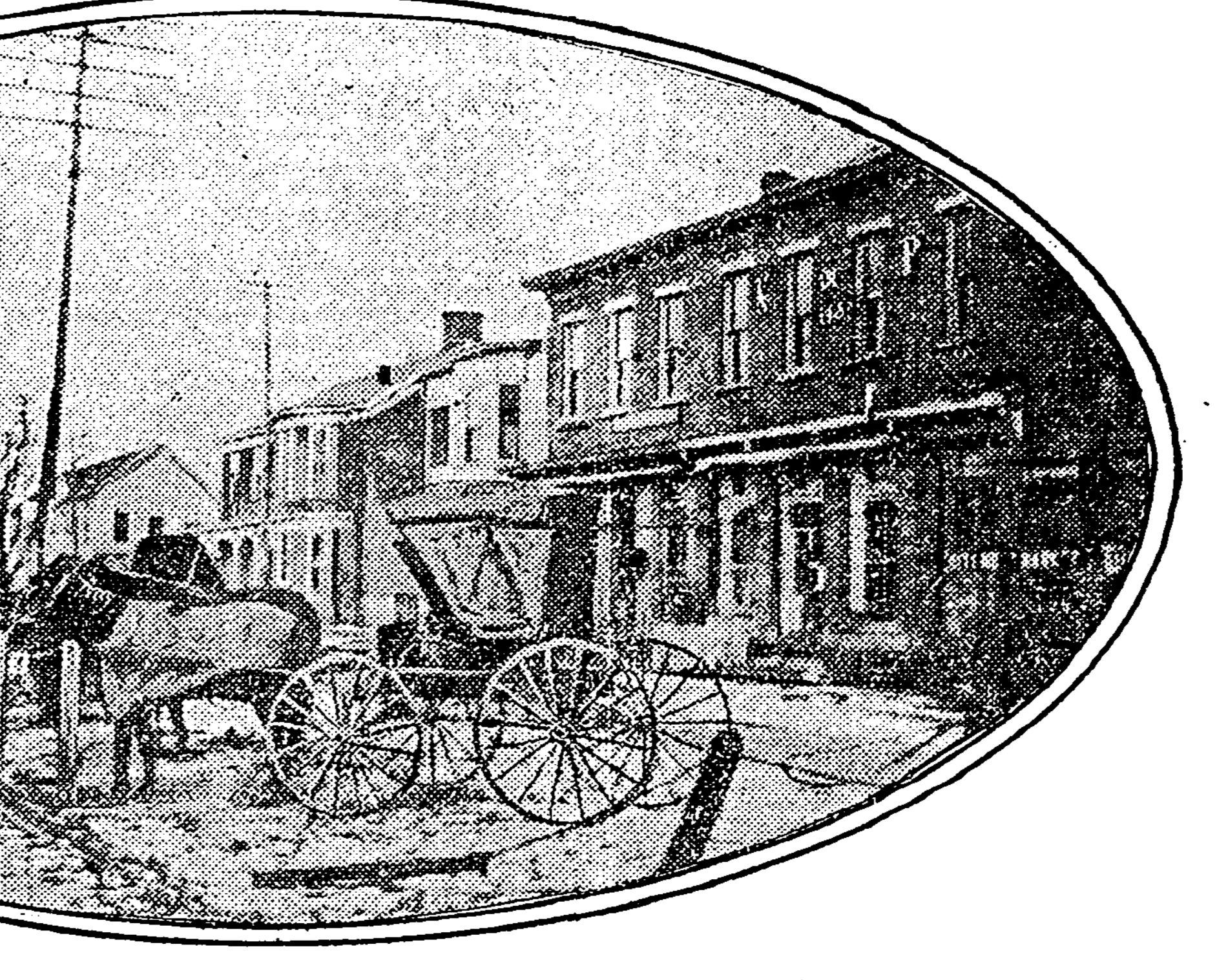
The County Prosecutor of Adams, C. C. Naylor, fell ill, and W. F. Stephenson, an attorney of West Union, was appointed a special prosecutor. On the Judge's birthday, December 13, the investigation was started. The men at the heads of the parties were called in and forced to tell where they had disbursed money. The witnesses received immunity. Then the party workers were called in to tell whom they had bought. Poll books were used to jog their memories. They were whitewashed, also.

Outsiders, aghast at the boodling, have asked the question which has puzzled the whole country: "Why did these people sell their votes?"

"Most of them didn't know it was wrong," says Judge Blair in answer. "They were urged to it by the men they would naturally follow—their fathers, preachers, and teachers."

"It is a custom of years and has grown on the people," says C. N. Gibbons, Sheriff. "The younger men thought it was all right. Then, too, every one did it and is doing it in this part of the State."

"The practice of boodling has grown gradually for the last thirty years, and to such an extent that the younger voters do not regard it in the light of a moral wrong," was Prosecutor Stephenson's summing up of the situation. "They simply have been trained to it," says the foreman of the Grand Jury. "They are not bad people and are law-abiding in other ways."



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selves some of the bribe money in their pockets. They seemed indifferent to the dishonor brought upon themselves; they wanted to pay small fines, accept disfranchisement, and have it over with. Civic righteousness was not awakened within them; some jests that about all they would lose by disfranchisement was the money they had been taking at the polls for the last twenty-five years. These confessed boodlers hoped to save from \$240 and upward of court costs by confessing their guilt. Most of them received for years the regular price of \$10 for their votes.

And after these men admitted their guilt, accepted disfranchisement, and perhaps paid small fines they returned to their homes and were accepted as honest citizens. The only difference in their treatment at the hands of their fellow-citizens will be that their membership in political clubs will not be solicited and they won't call to take them to the polls on election day.



At first Judge Blair found that the boodlers were a bit backward about stepping forward for punishment. Then he published a warning in all the newspapers in the county setting forth that if the vote sellers did not come in of their own free will, they would be indicted any way, and when brought before the Grand Jury would be sent to jail. This frightened swarms of ballot barterers, and day and night they flocked to the Court House here. Some of them walked miles to get to court. Hundreds arrived at a time. Indictments were ground out from a hundred to a hundred and fifty a day. As many as 180 have been sentenced in a day. Nearly a thousand have been sentenced so far.

Judge Blair has made his private office a confessional. There the guilty ones admit their wrong doing and receive their sentences. During the first week of the

investigation and continuing until within the last week or so, when the inquiry was shut down temporarily, the street in front of the Court House was blocked every morning with vote sellers who were eager to appear in court and face the music. They were impatiently waiting their turn to go before the Judge, tell all about their own and their neighbor's sins against their citizenship, and take their medicine.



A. Z. Blair, the Judge Who Started the Exposure.

They arrived in automobiles. In wagons drawn by horses, mules, and oxen, on horseback and afoot. They were rich and poor, educated and illiterate, laborer and merchant, men with police records and church pewholders.

They were afraid that even if they escaped the first investigation covering the entire county they would be caught in the net of the second investigation which is to come as soon as the jury and the Judge have had a brief breathing spell and the County Clerk can catch up with his records.

The hundreds of guilty voters realized that if they were indicted on the second investigation Judge Blair would not be disposed to deal lightly with them, and they do not like the thought of spending time in the Cincinnati workhouse. They were eager to surrender their honor to save the rest. That disfranchisement put them in the same class with the felon did not cause them to hesitate; they were willing to share his shame if they could escape his cell.

But these voluntary confessions won't serve to block a second investigation. It probably will take a new turn. So far only the vote sellers have suffered. Pressure will be exerted to make some of those who bought ballots pay the penalty too.

The cry has been raised that those who debauched the voters should not be allowed to escape, while those who were victimized are being punished. Of course, the party leaders and ward bosses who have "peached" have purchased immunity, but there are many "higher up" who are likely to be drawn into the investigation.

"Why shouldn't all be treated alike?" cry men who for years have raised their voices against election corruption, but not loud enough to start an investigation. "It wasn't the vote vendors or even the ballot buyers who debauched our county," they argued. "It was the dirty politicians who furnished the money barrel year after year—for what purpose is best known to themselves."

According to citizens familiar with election conditions, \$10,000 was sent from Cincinnati to Adams County in the last Presidential election to be used in the interests of W. H. Taft. That year the county, usually Democratic, went Republican by 600. The pollution of the polls was not confined to one party. Both Democrats and Republicans bid for voters. Some Republicans who confessed to having bought votes asked the Judge to decide whether it was larceny for the Democrats to steal the votes afterward, as they alleged had been done.

Universal corruption was possible because the general public conscience was dead to the responsibilities of an American citizen. The churches were silent while their pulpits glared, and forgot them the money they got for his ballots. A choir singer thought his indictment a great joke, and showed it at choir rehearsal. Even one minister pleaded guilty to selling his vote for \$10, and was fined.

Foremost citizens were chosen to preside at the election booths. They repeated their oaths gladly, and forgot them. Then they aided the ballot buyers in seeing that the vote vendors did what they had contracted to do.

On an election day within the last year men were put up on empty store boxes across from the Court House and ballot buyers of both parties bid openly for them. As high as \$25 was paid when the bidding grew spirited. As a voter was knocked down to the highest bidder he was led by him to the ballot box, where a judge of the same party as the successful ballot buyer peeped inside the ballot to see how it was marked. Then if the voter had done as he was expected to do he was paid.

Recently a farmer who owns a \$4,000 farm near this city appeared with his son before Judge Blair. Both had sold their votes and were sorry. The father was fined \$70 and the son \$5. Both were disfranchised for five years. A Jacksonville township farmer acknowledged that he had sold his vote three times at the last election. He received \$12.50 for voting the straight Democratic ticket, \$10 for voting the straight Democratic ticket, and \$5 for voting for a particular Democratic ticket. In view of his full confession, Judge Blair imposed only the usual penalties.

Among the widows indicted were two women, one a widow who admitted that she had sold her son's vote for \$5, and the other a mother who was dependent upon her son. The latter availed herself of one of the usual Adams County means of helping out a straightened pocketbook. The son, too, was indicted.

Mrs. Lawrence Furtwanger, 65 years old, walked fifteen miles into town from her home in Adams County to vote for her invalid son and husband. She pleaded guilty for both of them. In view of her poverty Judge Blair remitted their fines, but both men were disfranchised.

Before this investigation began vote sellers had complained that the last year was not so good a year in the vote market as of yore. Only \$18,000 was distributed among the voters, while the veteran boodlers pointed to elections years ago when it was common to have \$40,000 dumped into one election.