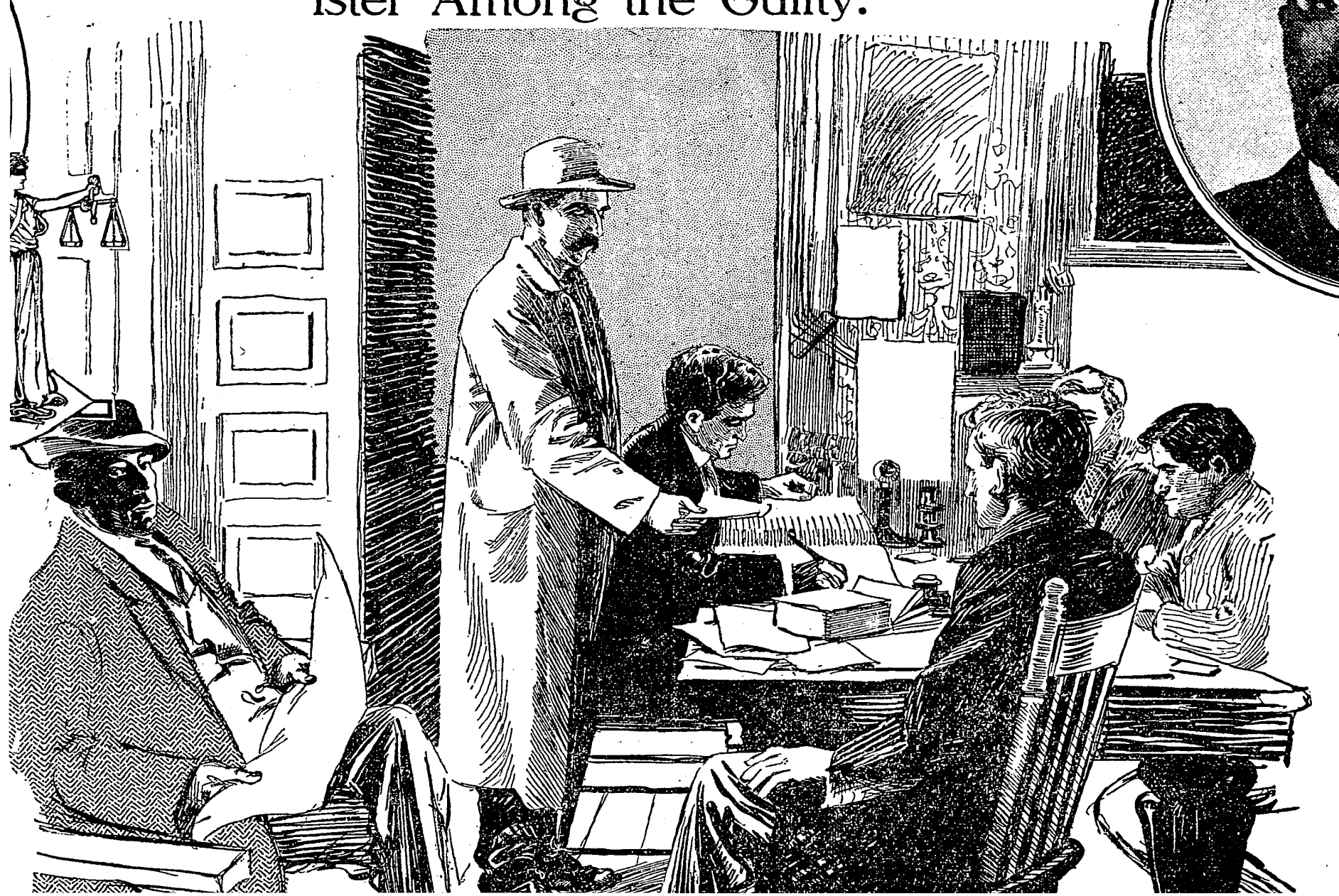


A COUNTY WHERE SELLING VOTES IS UNIVERSAL

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



Four Prisoners Charged with Selling Their Votes.



Voteseller Paying His Fine.



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

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 hundred 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 having 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 with the scum of the earth. For these people who played fast and loose with their honors as doctors, lawyers, ministers, merchants, farmers, mechanics—honest, God-fearing men, outside of politics. The fact that they 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 county look aghast at the cesspool of corruption that has been opened here. Mothers have sold the votes of sons and husbands, sisters have bartered away the suffrage of the 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 country of wooded 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 taint 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 things of 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 box 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 centre 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.

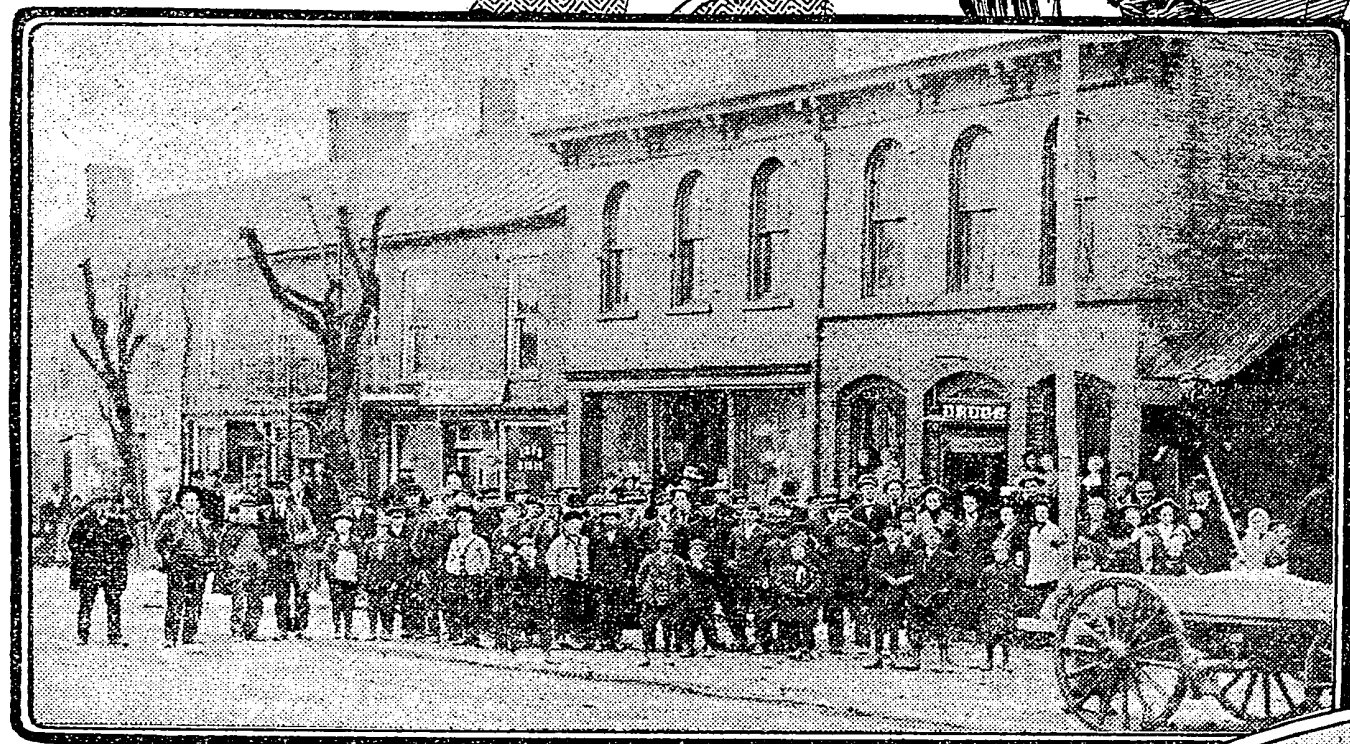
Patrolmen are at a high pitch here. There are Grand Army men in every township. But the flag and the ballot have no connection in the minds of the Adams County men. They honor the flag, they smirch the ballot. Bronze badges of war honor are worn by the prisoners in the dock who come before Judge Blair and the Grand Jury. Adams County is an atavism. It has the political methods that were in vogue before the war. Elections were clean in the county until thirty years ago when "Calico Charley" Foster ran for Governor. He sent agents through the coun-

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



Street Scene in Pelee, Adams County, Ohio.

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 facsimile 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.

Farty 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 back candidates for other men back races. It's fun to win. Wrong? It is the only way, I tell you. The voters desire 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 stopping the

the lid. 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 intertwined 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 boodling 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 boodling had already begun in this county."

"It was stopped for a time by the Australian ballot. The law establishing this system was fathered by Guy Mallon in the Legislature, and it impressed me so much that I named my oldest son after him. I was in politics some, and was impressed by the dirty methods the politicians used."

"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 we had 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 quit. I made up my mind to break up the practice, and I'm going to it. 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 his character. 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 Soloto County; he threw out the gamblers and the scariest women. He is a leading figure in Antislavery League work."

Judge Blair decided this Fall he would clean up Adams County. He knew almost every voter in the county, for he has served as chairman of both the Democratic and Republican committees. He organized a special grand jury composed

of seven Democrats, seven Republicans, and one prohibitionist. The foreman is Lucien J. Fenton 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. P. 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."

One of the leaders in the vote-buying movement sums up the situation in the following way:

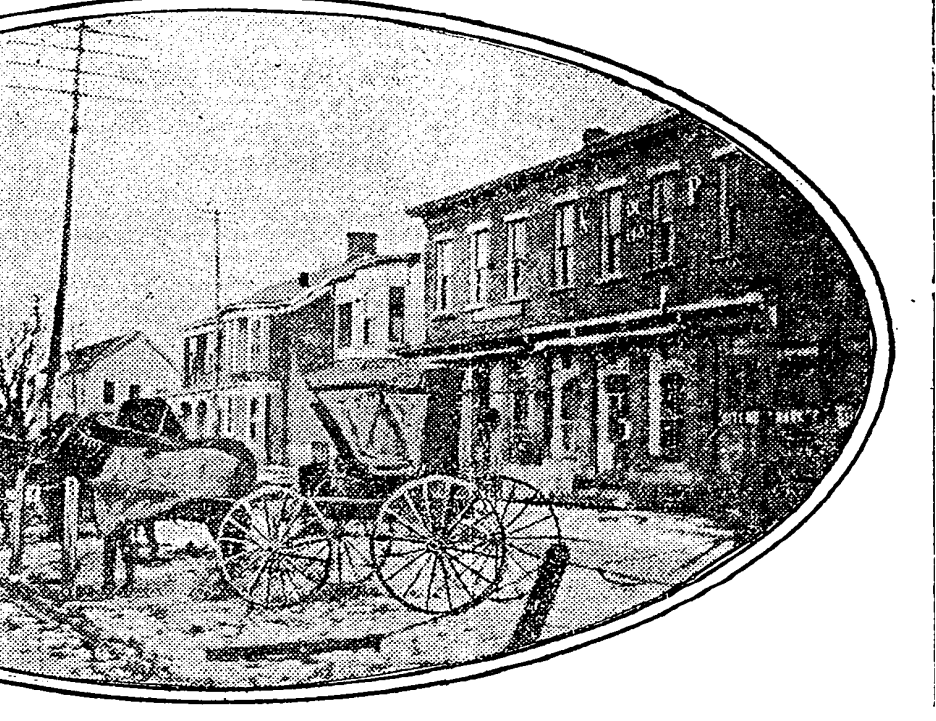
"Adams County people, the men who have been selling their votes for years and the men who have been buying them are not bad at heart. They are simple minded, home-loving, and honest in everything except voting. Fewer residents of Adams County break the general laws of the State than the people of other 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 miscellaneous 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 heavy 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-



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

of the corruption in elections started here. School "marms" have been forced to produce the votes of their male relatives any friends in order to get teachers' certificates. Control of the Board of School Examiners means many votes to the party in power.

"Adams County people look upon the matter of buying and selling votes as a business proposition. The average man waits patiently until he is 21. He knows that after he has become of age he will be able to get sufficient money every year from the party workers to buy his Fall suit. He does not lie, steal, gamble or drink to a greater extent than the boy of the city. His vices are few."

"He knows that he can sell his votes and still keep his position in society. But he also knows that if he breaks other laws he will be ostracized. He takes money from the election worker without a quiver of conscience and takes a prominent part in the next prayer meeting following election day."

"The men who buy the votes are forced to do so in order to hold the power. They hate the system, detest the men whose votes they buy, but brag of the large corruption fund they helped to distribute. Each year for the past quarter of a century a schedule of prices has been taken to the central committee at the State capital in order to bring money to help swell the corruption fund. Election bribery is not new. The present investigation has thrown but a feeble light upon the situation."

"After the Grand Jury has thoroughly investigated, the farmers will gather at the stores, blacksmith shops, and barber shops and talk about conditions. They will argue politics the same as before. They will explain how the county at large can be saved and will deplore the awful condition of society in the large

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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.

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. Presumably 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 raised alike?" cry men who for years have treated their votes 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 pewholders paid their pew rent with the money they got for their ballots. A choir singer thought his indictment a 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 gibber, and forgot them. Then they added the ballot buyers in seeing that the voters were done 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 \$250 for voting the straight Republican ticket, \$10 for voting the straight Democratic ticket, and \$3 for voting for a particular Democratic candidate. He really voted the Democratic ticket. In view of his full confession, Judge Blair imposed only the usual penalties.

Among the others indicted were two women, one a widow who admitted that she had walked fifteen miles into town from her home in Turn Creek in behalf of 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 \$16,000 was distributed among the voters, while the veteran hoodlums pointed to elections years ago when it was common to have \$40,000 dumped into one election.