

**THE BATTLE AGAINST BRIBERY; BEING THE  
ONLY COMPLETE NARRATIVE OF JOSEPH W.  
FOLK'S WARFARE ON BOODLERS,  
INCLUDING ALSO THE STORY OF THE GET-  
RICH-QUICK CONCERNS AND THE EXPOSURE  
OF BRIBERY IN THE MISSOURI LEGISLATURE**

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The battle against bribery; being the only complete narrative of Joseph W. Folk's warfare on boodlers, including also the story of the get-rich-quick concerns and the exposure of bribery in the Missouri Legislature by Claude Wetmore

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**CLAUDE WETMORE**

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IN THE MISSOURI LEGISLATURE

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By Claude Wetmore

Author of "Fighting Under the Southern Cross," "Inceland,"  
"In a Brazilian Jungle," and "Out of a Fleur-de-Lis"

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TO  
ALEXANDER NICOLAS DEMENIL, A.M., PH.D., LL.B.  
THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

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DR. DEMENIL IN WRITING "THE LITERATURE OF THE  
LOUISIANA TERRITORY" HAS PERFORMED A SER-  
VICE THAT ENDEARS HIM TO ALL WRITERS  
OF THE MIDDLE WEST

# FOREWORD

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**A**S city editor of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, in 1898, I directed the work of a dozen reporters who investigated the bribery of the municipal assembly by Robert M. Snyder, when he paid \$250,000 to secure the passage of a blanket franchise that should cover nearly all the streets of St. Louis for an electric railroad system. We had sufficient proof to convince any fair-minded jury that at least a score of persons had committed a felony and should be sent to the penitentiary; and we offered to submit this proof to the proper officials. Result—the grand jury was instructed to read the articles in the Post-Dispatch, and if possible return indictments against the authors for criminal libel.

As associate editor of the St. Louis Chronicle I was familiar with the work of Mr. Folk from the day when he opened fire on the hoodlums until a year had elapsed; and as editor of The Valley Weekly, and author with Lincoln J. Steffens of the first of McClure's series, I have been in touch with him ever since.

In order that no error might creep into these pages I have secured data from the following well-known newspaper men of St. Louis: Kenneth G. Bellairs, who has been stationed at the Four Courts for several years; William C. McCarty, who was employed in a similar capacity until he resigned to join the Louisiana Purchase Exposition; Chester C. Rider, who went to Guadalajara, when extradition proceedings concerning Kratz were pending; and J. J. McAuliffe, who did more than any one man to bring about an exposure of conditions at Jefferson City, and who followed Legislative Agent Kelley into Canada, and there secured damning evidence against former Lieutenant-Governor John A. Lee.

To all of these, who have at different times been my co-workers, I wish to express my thanks; and also wish to state that their co-operation made Mr. Folk's work possible.

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# The Battle Against Bribery

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## CHAPTER I

### IN DARK ST. LOUIS

“YOU have the moon yet, ain't it? Well, what more do you want?”

This answer was given by the Mayor of St. Louis—a wealthy German-American politician—to a committee of citizens who in the dawn of 1900 visited the city hall and complained because tardy action by certain officials had resulted in a failure to light the streets of a residence district.

It was a reply typical of the period, and proved the attitude of those placed in office toward those who had placed them there. The servant had turned the tables and was the master.

On that day the fourth city in size and commercial importance in the United States could be compared with a tree in a jungle of Brazil that had been strangled by a vegetable parasite. Once it had been of luxurious growth, but a vine had crept upon its trunk and along the branches, piercing the bark as it spread, and had sucked its sap for sustenance. The leaves of the creeper waxed large and glossy, but the tree drooped, spots of decay appeared in places and its progress was arrested.

That vine that found root in St. Louis, the name of which was bribery, had thrust its soft and leech-like feelers into every department of the city government before the people were aware of its existence, and was hugging the municipality in a death embrace.

The day when it came into being is not well known ;

some persons say the seeds were cast a dozen years ago, while others maintain that it was a score, or even two score.

Wealthy men—"leading citizens"—were responsible for its transplanting into the soil. They sought special privileges, that they might increase their already large fortunes, and their money influenced legislation.

A—, the owner of a warehouse, desired the passage, by the municipal assembly, of an ordinance that would grant him the right to build a railroad side-track over a public thoroughfare in his property. Several members of the law-making body doubted the wisdom of heeding his request and a forecast proved that a vote on the measure would result in a tie. A— then called upon a member whom he knew to be in impecunious circumstances, and after feeling his way with care and arguing on the advisability of passing the measure, he said that he was prepared to make his friend a little present, something which would pay his house rent for a few months. Result, he got the side-track.

Thus it started, and for a time the method of operation was the same as that pursued by A—. Men of wealth would seek out the weak and the poor who had been elected to office, and by pressing their palms with greenbacks would secure petty special privileges.

From this small beginning grew the political boss, the spoilsman and the method of adverse legislation.

The three came together—the boss, who directed such legislation as was considered profitable, and who secured the election to office of men who would do his bidding; the spoilsman, who sought positions of trust solely for the purpose of personal gain, and adverse legislation, which was the cudgel used by both of them in times of dullness, when men with money seemed wary of their clutches.

The boss shook hands one moment with the millionaire and the next hob-nobbed with a dive-keeper who, with the whip of vice, controlled a certain number of votes. He was the go-between for the men who wished to sell their honor and the men who wished to

purchase such a commodity—for a commodity it became in those days, the price fluctuating no more than does that of the average stock.

The boss became such because of his ability to control election machinery, which enabled him to place in office such a number of his personal selection as would insure the carrying out of his plans. This done, he held the same position with reference to those who wished to accept bribes and those who wished to offer them as does the commission merchant to the small trader and the large owner.

The spoilsman knew no will but that of the boss. He became a candidate for office at the suggestion of the boss, knowing that if elected he would vote to order. Men struggled for these positions, they expended large sums of money that they might have the privilege of selling themselves, and the induction into office became a regular business, requiring a certain amount of capital and a knowledge of the "tricks of the trade."

The weapon, adverse legislation, was employed in a scientific manner. It was not frequently used—only when the income fell below the average, or the boss was in a vindictive frame of mind. It came to be estimated that a seat in the house of delegates was worth a certain sum of money per annum and a seat in the council another sum. And likewise the boss insisted that his "fees" should never fall below a certain amount. Therefore, when there was a dearth of bills from persons who sought special privileges, a measure inimical to a certain person or certain interests was introduced in the assembly and promptly enacted into a law. The boss and spoilsmen then waited, knowing what would happen, and pretty soon overtures would come from the interests that had been made to suffer, a bargain would be struck, and finally the adverse legislation would be repealed.

Not all the men whom the boss placed in power or permitted to take office were dishonest. Indeed, if he could promote the interests of a candidate who through