

THE SEED FRAUDS AT WASHINGTON

One of the reasons given for the selection of the canny Scotchman, James Wilson, as secretary of agriculture, was that he was a practical as well as a book farmer, and that crooked contractors and congressmen, with axes to grind, couldn't fool him. His sponsors seem to have thundered louder, in the index, than his record warrants. Secretary Wilson may know tobacco seed from turnip seed when he sees them, but if charges made by the Wholesale Seedsmen's League, are true, the public is being badly imposed upon in the weight, variety and quality of the seeds now distributed, and the contractors are being paid double what the seeds are worth. These are a few of the charges publicly made at a meeting of the Seedsmen's League, held in New York last week. In the packages sent out under the contract for 1901, all the important specifications have been ignored. Instead of named varieties, the packages are merely marked selected seeds. The packages are smaller than required by the specifications. Packages of cucumber seed that should run 80 to the pound, run 104 to the pound. Onion seed, which should run 96, run 106 to the pound. Peas, which should run 160, run 304 to the bushel. Sweet corn packages, required to run 60 to the bushel, actually run 290 to the bushel. Packages, marked tobacco seed, contain turnip and other vegetable seeds instead. Many cheap seeds, not called for in the contracts, are included. The contract was let for \$78,000, which is twice what the sixteen or seventeen million packages of seeds with which it is being filled, are worth.

Everybody knew that the seed distribution feature of the department's work was a costly humbug. These charges indicate it to be corrupt as well as costly. It is not to be supposed that Secretary Wilson, shrewd Scotchman that he is, can stand guard over every package of seed sent out, but he is bound to stand guard over his corps of inspectors, and see that they compel the observance of plain contract specifications. The charge of the Seedsmen's League are of so direct and specific a nature that Secretary Wilson is in duty bound to investigate them, and, if well founded, bring rascally contractors and negligent inspectors up with a round turn. It is not Secretary Wilson's fault that congress has passed laws providing for a costly distribution of seeds, which fail to be of any public benefit, but it will be his fault if contractors are permitted to cheat the government in the quality and quantity of the seeds furnished. If Secretary Wilson is fit for his place, he should be able to prevent costly frauds of this nature. — Philadelphia Times, April 18, 1901.

Free Seed Contracts.

Pursuant to an act of congress, the

agricultural department contracted for, and is distributing free, among the people, flower and vegetable seeds. It is alleged that these seeds are distributed for experimental purposes, in order to determine the varieties that will do best in certain localities. Many regard this as an official fiction, to cover a totally different object, namely, a cheap and easy method for some congressmen to retain the good will and votes of a portion of their constituents.

The character and quality of the seeds distributed by the government have often been called into question, and many go to the length of terming the varieties both cheap and worthless. A correspondent, whose communication appears in another column, declares that there is evidence of loopholes in the specifications of the contract for these seeds, by which the contractor, if he wishes, can make use of the cheapest and commonest varieties to be bought in the market. According to the specifications, the particular varieties of each sort of vegetable seeds to be used and the number of packages to be put up are distinctly stated, as, for example, an equal number of pounds of six varieties of table beet, four of cucumber, five of lettuce, and so on through the list, in all, 13,936,000 packets of vegetable seeds. According to the correspondent, a number of packets distributed under the contract, simply bear the specific name of the vegetable, and the words, "a selected variety." This appears to be a direct violation of the terms of the specifications, or, if not, it certainly would indicate the existence of a loophole by which the contractor could evade the spirit of his contract and reap an extravagant profit. Examples are given by which the contractor, under this term of "selected" variety, could go into the market, and, by purchasing, at current rates, effect a saving of \$20,999 on vegetable seeds alone.

It is claimed, also, that there is a great variation in the amount of seeds, of the same sort, in different packets, and a decidedly less quantity in nearly all cases examined, than the specifications call for, amounting, in some cases, to 40 per cent. This is a serious allegation, and it is one which calls for prompt investigation by the department of agriculture. Protests have been made from all parts of the country, against the practice of government free distribution of seeds. At least one secretary of the department of agriculture has recommended a discontinuance, but congress has refused. It has done worse; it has ordered an increase in the annual output. As congress has seen fit to do this, it is the duty of the department of agriculture to so draw the specifications, that the contractor must live up to them, and furnish for distribution, the best quality of seeds obtain-

able, and give full weight.—Philadelphia Public Ledger, April 18, 1901.

Governmental Free Seed Farce.

To the forty-two members of the Wholesale Seedsmen's League, and others interested:

The fraudulent practices, so generally talked of the last two years, in connection with the details of the congressional free seed distribution, have been eclipsed this spring of 1901, by the course of the department of agriculture, in sending out flat packets bearing only the imprint of the family name of the vegetable; no specific name, simply a statement that the packet contains a selected variety, such as radish, lettuce, melon, cucumber. The result of this is to afford the contractor and department employees interested in supplying and putting up the seed, an opportunity to put in something cheap, and, consequently, to make an enormous profit, quite thirty per cent., over the normal and legitimate profit which might be expected upon an honest transaction.

The specifications for furnishing the seeds, issued the 27th of January, 1900, by the department of agriculture, called for fixed quantities of designated varieties and sub-varieties, and the various bidders based their estimates on the cost of the respective quantities and special varieties so named in the printed list of specifications, but the secretary of agriculture has permitted the contractor to print seed packets, and to fill these packets with sorts of seed not mentioned in the specifications, and, undoubtedly, very common and very cheap sorts. And this fraud does not stop with the putting in of unnamed, common, and cheap seeds, but the fraud extends to the shaving down of the weights in the packets, as designated in the specifications, a curtailment ranging from ten per cent to forty per cent. This represents that much profit in itself.

How are these illegitimate profits divided? Who are the scoundrels? Those other bidders who failed to be awarded the contract, certainly cannot otherwise conclude that they have been badly deceived by the secretary of agriculture, while on the other hand, those agriculturists who receive the diminished quantities of unnamed seeds, are not given any intimation whether the seeds are of varieties, late or early, large or small.

Was there ever a transaction, in any department of the government, to surpass this? Certainly the seed section of the department of agriculture is very weak, and its administration is a disgrace to the agricultural interests of the nation. The entire department of agriculture has for years been best known by the designation of "The Government Seed Shop," a bad enough reflection upon what should be a department as