

their attention turned to dangers ahead. With their coal supply diminishing in quantity and increasing in the cost of production, their trade menaced by rivalry of vigorous nations like the United States and Germany, and their taxes increasing, it is not strange they should begin to take note of other conditions in an effort to forecast where the next blow will fall.

One of the forecasts of coming trouble is based upon the diminishing supply of timber in the world. An experienced forester has informed the British public there is no doubt whatever of an approaching timber famine. In reviewing his statement the Westminster Gazette says: "If it was not for the foreign supplies we receive, a timber famine would have overtaken this country long ago, because our home-grown supply has not been able to meet a tithe of the demand for long enough, and that only of inferior kinds of timber. If the foreign supply of fir alone, was to fall off sensibly now, the whole building trade of the country would come to a partial standstill, and our wagon companies would be next to idle. The great consumers of what used to be called ship-timber are now railway-carriage and wagon builders, who alone absorb most of the best hard woods to an extent exceeding anything known when ships were built of timber."

The modern world is indeed rapidly consuming timber. The lumberman is no longer the sole destroyer. An enormous quantity of wood is now used every year in the production of charcoal and of pulp for making paper, and the demand for wood for such purposes increases rapidly. Evidently the commonwealth that permits its forests to be wasted by careless lumbering or swept away by fires is sadly neglectful of its wealth. We are now so prosperous and have so much wood in sight we can hardly perceive ahead any danger of a coming timber famine; it is therefore worth our while to pay attention to the warning that comes from Great Britain. California can no more reasonably boast of having forests to burn than money to burn.—San Francisco Call.

FREE SEED AGAIN.

Mr. Morton, recalling his unavailing battle for its abolition, now speaks with bitter sarcasm of "the aged idiocy of the promiscuous and gratuitous distribution of seeds by the department of agriculture and the representatives and senators of the American congress." Unfortunately the congressional skin is thick and the barbs of the ex-secretary will not penetrate far enough to be felt. The congressional free seed has become chronic.

That Government Seed Shop.

Judging by a number of packages of agricultural department seeds that have

been sent to this office, the wrong and outrage of the free distribution has been made ten times worse this year than ever before. The pretense of a purpose to introduce *new* varieties has long been abandoned; but this year there is no pretense at issuing even *valuable* varieties, and, in fact, the names of the varieties do not appear! Just think of that! The packets are marked, "Celery, a Selected Variety;" "Cucumber, a Selected Variety;" "Watermelon, a Selected Variety," and so on and so forth, *ad nauseam*. We should think the contractors could easily supply the stuff, under these circumstances, for half the contract price of \$78,000—even supposing that the seeds are fresh. It would seem that somebody in the department must be either grossly incompetent or grossly dishonest. The thing has risen to the proportions of a national disgrace. What is Mr. Wilson thinking about?—Country Gentleman.

Mr. Morton Offers a Few Caustic Remarks Concerning Certain Seeds of Dissension.

There is at present a pretty, little rumpus on in the agricultural department over alleged frauds in the distribution of seeds to the guileless farmer. The seedsmen who did not get the contract for supplying the department are making all sorts of allegations against the firm which secured the plum, and have phrased their charges in such specific terms that it is certain an investigation of some sort will be set afoot.

Out of this muddle comes one ray of light, a letter from J. Sterling Morton, former secretary of agriculture. Morton is a man of vast good sense, and while secretary of Agriculture he spent his time berating the congressmen for maintaining this senseless system of seed distribution, and in giving away cabinet secrets to Washington correspondents. In regard to this seed matter he has written to one of the rival seed concerns which did not get the contract, as follows:

"My Dear Sir: I reply to yours of the 4th, and am pleased to learn that the Wholesale Seed Merchants' League is beginning to understand the possible disasters which are to come because of the gratuitous distribution of seeds at government expense by the agricultural department and members of congress. It is safe to say that under the old method, prior to my administration of the department, the West and all newly-opened agricultural districts of the United States were supplied with every variety of weed seed, because the department took the sweepings of all the seed shops in the United States at so much per pound, gross. This refuse stuff was sent into Washington, and senators and representatives permitted to pick out women to dip with teaspoons, these seeds into little packets, which were made by hand, and then they were sent to the different congressional districts for planting. Thus we got the Russian thistle and a lot of other pestiferous plants all through the northwest.

But it is not the result of the method that I object to so much (although they are bad enough) but the paternalism which prompts the distribution of these seeds. The principle is all wrong.

Very truly yours,
J. STERLING MORTON.
Nebraska City, April 8, 1901.

A more caustic criticism of one of the silly governmental methods in Washington was never before contained in so small a space. This seed distribution gold brick scheme has been worked for years, not because it was worth while, but because no congressman, with farmer constituents, has ever had the hardihood to oppose it.

It began in a small way years ago, when the agricultural department was trying to find excuses for its continuance as such. Some head of that institution thought it would be an excellent plan to secure an appropriation for the distribution of seeds of foreign plants and vegetables that might be worth while experimenting with in this country. Within a year, however, the plan had degenerated into a rank case of paternalism.

The seeds of rare and useful plants and vegetables were no longer sought as before, but instead, tons of common or garden seed were being distributed to the farmer. Congressmen found it an excellent method of paying their political debts. Every farmer in the district could be remembered with a package of seed, and the packing department became the Botany Bay to which office-seekers were sent when every other plan for placing them had failed.

The seed distribution department thus became a bureau for paying political debts. No attention was paid to this branch of the department work, and, as has been truthfully said by ex-Secretary Morton, more unique kinds of seeds were distributed than were heard of before. The farmer who sent on for lettuce seed got packets bearing that name, but when he planted them he was rewarded with a crop of hollyhocks or foxglove plants.

Pumpkin seeds produced pomegranates and many an anxious agriculturist has gaped open mouthed at the growth of jimson weeds from pedigreed seed sent out by the department.

Perhaps it would be a good thing if the charges of the rival seed concerns should prove true. It would have a tendency to bring the practice into disrepute and might lead to its final abandonment. This would be a good thing for both farmers and congressmen if they could only be brought to believe it.—The Morning Telegraph, April 28, 1901.

Several columns of THE CONSERVATIVE will be devoted to the discussion of problems in "Municipal Government," in the issue of May 30. "Ring Rule and Domination" will be discussed by Francis Marion Lowes.