

THE FIGHT OVER THE SAN FRANCISCO POST-OFFICE.



ONE of the hottest fights the stone trade has known for years has been over the bidding for supplying granite for the new United States Post Office building at San Francisco. This has kept several States aroused for weeks, has set Congressmen and politicians hard at work pulling all wires within reach, has called out reams of newspaper controversy, and has even caused the appointment of a special Government commission. The story of the controversy is an interesting one, but in the absence of an official report it is difficult to get at the exact facts. No two accounts of the matter agree. The papers published in the States where the different contractors live all tell stories that widely vary in the most essential particulars. The main points in the fight are as follows: Several months ago the National Government advertised for bids for the stone work, etc., for the new post office and court house at San Francisco. The specifications called for "granite," and no particular kind was indicated. As the amount of granite required on the contract was 135,000 feet, or 15,000 tons, the bidding naturally aroused great interest. The bids were opened on April 17, at the office of the architect at Washington. W. H. Ellis, of Cincinnati, put in one bid, specifying the use of Peerless granite. This is from the Index quarry, Washington. He also put in a higher bid, specifying the Delano granite, from California. The California Construction Company based its bid on the use of Rocklin, California, granite. The Bentley Construction Company specified the Raymond, California, granite. Finally the John A. Davidson Company, of Chicago, put in a bid, higher than the others, specifying the use of Maine granite. Then began the merry war. The people of California made the not unnatural claim that, inasmuch as the building was in their own leading city, it should be built of stone native to the State. The San Francisco "Evening Post" voiced the sentiment of the people as follows:

"If the new post office were an ornamental structure, designed to gratify the fancy of a notional man or an individual crank, it might not be inappropriate to build it of stone dug in Texas, Maine, South Carolina or any other State; but, as a matter of fact, it is a public building, and the Government ought to desire to construct it in a practical and economical manner. There may be, and probably is, objection to some of the stone quarried in California. Perhaps Rocklin granite is not adapted to such a building as the new post office is designed to be; but there are other quarries in the State from which the very best material may be obtained. Those located in the County of Inyo, for instance, yielded the marble and granite out of which the Mills Building was constructed, and no prettier edifice than that exists anywhere. If the Treasury Department officials who have charge of letting the contract of the new post office authorize from other States the use of material which can be obtained in this State, they will justly merit the criticisms, not only of our

people generally, but of our capitalists, whose money is invested in quarries and who are trying to develop the marble and stone industries of the coast."

But the State of Washington had something to say to this. The Chamber of Commerce of Seattle addressed the following letter to James K. Taylor, the supervising architect at Washington:

"Substitution of California granite at this time would be a distinct condemnation of Washington granite, for purely local reasons. These reasons are not creditable to those urging the change, for they are simply and solely that the building should be a State affair instead of a National, and that more Government money would thereby be spent among Californians in its construction. This is selfish and unpatriotic. Were the building put up by the State itself for its own purposes the course recommended, if pursued, would be more or less praiseworthy. In a National building, paid for and owned by all alike, it would be reprehensible in the extreme. It is not urged, we believe, that the Washington granite is inferior, and in truth it cannot be so urged. The granite here is first class and in every way fit for Government houses at San Francisco, Washington, D. C., or anywhere else. The Federal Building at Portland, erected nearly thirty years ago, was constructed of Washington sandstone. This State is noted above all others for the abundance, excellence and variety of its house-building materials. There are lime, cement, stones, timbers of many kinds, and clays, from which common, pressed, fire and other bricks are made, as also terra cotta. That the Government of the United States should place its condemnation upon any of these materials, with no more reason than in the California case, is not to be contemplated for a moment."

But this was not the final word. Senator Mason, of Illinois, took up the cudgels for the John A. Davidson Company, of Chicago. The claim was set up that California granite contained iron that discolored it and caused it to crumble. As the Davidson Company proposed to use Maine granite, the Senators and Congressmen from that State took a hand in the row, to push the claims of the latter bidder. So, then, at last the fight stretched clear across the continent, from Maine to California. Some of the contestants came to actual blows at Washington.

At this point of the controversy a special Government committee was appointed to examine and report upon the several grades of California granite offered. The committee consisted of Hon. Frank A. Vanderlip, Assistant Secretary of the Treasury; Dr. Caleb Whitehead, an expert chemist, attached to the Mint Bureau, and Mr. J. W. Roberts, of San Francisco, superintendent of the public building. The committee visited the quarries and inspected a number of buildings where the granites had been used. It reported that the Raymond granite was as durable as any to be found. Meanwhile the first bids had been rejected and new ones called for. On these the contract was finally awarded to the Bentley Construction Company at \$802,500, to use the Raymond granite. So San Francisco's post office will be built of California granite, after all.