

GET PROMOTERS IN RAID

Five Banana Company Officials Arrested on Fraud Charge.

A PREACHER AMONG THEM

Postal Men Declare Honduras Plantation Was Nothing More than Swamp.

Charged with using the mails to defraud, several officers and directors of El Progresso Banana Company and the International Finance Company were arrested yesterday at the office of the latter company.

Frank J. Watrous, president of El Progresso Banana Company, reached New York three or four months ago, after he had visited Honduras, where the company was said to have a large banana plantation.

As the officers were about to start away with their three prisoners they met O. W. Simmons, secretary-treasurer of the banana company, and he, too, was placed under arrest.

After the detectives had gone to the Federal Building with the four men then under arrest the postoffice inspectors, who had remained behind to superintend the packing of papers which they seized as evidence, met the Rev. Claude M. Severance, a director of the banana company, just as he was entering a building, and he, too, was taken into custody.

When arraigned before Commissioner Shields, Watrous, the alleged promoter of the banana company, was held in default of \$5,000 bail. The Rev. Claude M. Severance, who lives at Twelfth avenue and 42d street, Borough Park, Brooklyn, failed to obtain \$5,000 bail, and O. W. Simmons could not produce a bondsman for \$2,500. Sanders and Harvey were released in \$2,500 bail.

According to the postal authorities, Frank W. Watrous, a native of Boston, went "broke" in Denver toward the close of 1908 after being interested in some mining deals. He is alleged to have gone then to Houston, Tex., where he was helped by some friends, and later raised money on his mother's home and furniture in Denver, and organized El Progresso Banana Company, which he capitalized at \$1,500,000 in Arizona, in January, 1908.

Coming to New York, it is said by the postal authorities, Watrous got in touch with Sanders and Harvey. Their concern, the International Finance Company, arranged to dispose of El Progresso stock at 50 cents on the dollar. Of this, it is alleged, 10 cents went to the banana company and the remainder to Sanders and Harvey, but the postal authorities say that the commission was divided with Watrous, who conducted a correspondence with H. L. Harvey, who lived at the Astor House.

With the proceeds of the stock sold Watrous opened an office at Chattanooga, Tenn., and later went to Honduras, from La Ceiba he wrote in February, 1909, that the company had secured seventy thousand acres of land and was engaged in planting bananas. The postal authorities say that the company, under the laws of Honduras, could not own property in that country, but Watrous had got a few thousand acres under "donation."

Glowing Circulars Written. The conditions under which he got the property was that a quarter should be improved and planted during the first year. While no work was done, it is alleged, Watrous wrote glowing circulars, describing the splendid agricultural lands, and he backed this up with a description by Dr. Morales, a director of the company, who told of the fine banana plantation, covering 13,750 acres. With the proceeds of stock sales, the postal authorities say, he enlarged the Chattanooga office, put his brother-in-law, O. W. Simmons, in charge, then came North and married Miss Alice Fernald, of Roxbury, Mass., who now lives at her old home. He took her to Honduras shortly after their marriage, and as the "donation" conditions had not been fulfilled the land was forfeited to the government.

Watrous then, with the assistance of a lawyer named Melsner, tried to get a concession from the Honduran government. He was seen-sawed by the officials, but finally succeeded in getting a concession of ten thousand acres for which he was to pay \$10,000 silver. He was also to survey the land and build a railroad to the coast. None of these conditions was fulfilled, but the sale of stock, it is charged, went on merrily through the International Finance Company, the principal salesman being the Rev. Claude M. Severance, who had already acted as a stock salesman for other companies.

A sample of the alleged letters sent out by Severance to other clergymen is in the possession of the postal authorities. It is addressed to the Rev. D. C. McNair, of Wayne, Mich., and, among other things, said: "I am decidedly well pleased with Mr. Watrous. He is a clean gentleman; does not drink, does not use tobacco; he is interested in Young Men's Christian Association work. There are no other men of this kind in his line. He has a magnificent presence, is winsome and impresses you with great reserve strength. I urge you now to join us and to sell stock to your neighbors with the perfect assurance that you will all double your money in a year and secure an investment which will mean a large annual income. You are justified in working night and day to secure two thousand shares for yourself, for you would be self-supporting in three years' time with such an investment."

Say Plantation Was Swamp. The Rev. D. C. McNair bought two thousand shares at 50 cents a share, but later the stock went to 75 cents. The only shipment made by the company, it is alleged, was a lot of six hundred bunches of bananas, which the postal authorities say were purchased from others, as the company had not even an acre of banana lands, that which they had being valueless swamp.

On receiving complaints in July W. W. Dickson, postoffice inspector in charge of this district, put Kincaid and Reddy to work on the case. The New Orleans

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