The Sun.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 14, 1901.

Subscription ⊕ Stat. Postpaid.

DAILY, per month	60 cts
DAILY, per year	$ 00
SUNDAY, per year	$ 00
DAILY AND SUNDAY, per year	$ 00
DAILY AND SUNDAY, per month	70

THE SUN, New York City

Entered at the Post Office at New York as second class matter.

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A Dangerous Experiment.

In our candid opinion public policy and the best interests of the Administration require that Secretary Wilson, of the Department of Agriculture, should abandon his present ingenious plan for promoting the export of various American fruits.

The Secretary's intentions are excellent. He is properly enthusiastic over the quality of the product of our fruit-growing industry. He wants to bring the product to the attention of foreign markets. He foresees a great and profitable increase in the exports of American fruit. His idea is to stimulate this trade by putting the Government into temporary partnership with private owners and shippers. The Department of Agriculture is to guarantee against loss the persons shipping fruit abroad under its supervision, or to undertake to defray the cost of transportation, leaving in either case the profits to the owners and shippers. In brief, the Government is to stand any loss on the commercial transaction, while the shippers take any profits.

Secretary Wilson has procured from Comptroller Tracewell of the Treasury Department an opinion bearing on the question of the propriety of such action. The Comptroller thinks that the language of the act appropriating money for the encouragement of pomological enterprise authorizes the Secretary "to incur any reasonable and necessary expense, within the limits of the appropriation, and not otherwise forbidden by law, to carry out its objects." As to the proposed scheme of partnership the Comptroller says: "I know no law which forbids the same."

The significant feature of this opinion is not that Comptroller Tracewell knows no law forbidding the proposed arrangement, but that he does not know, or really to point out, any law specifically warranting it.

While the amount of money involved is small, the departure in principle and the initiative in policy are of enormous importance. This is a bounty on exports. It is impossible to take any other view of it. And whatever may be said for or against the expediency of direct pecuniary assistance granted by the United States Government to the shippers of American products, the fact remains that the question is one which should be decided by Congress after full consideration of the policy of establishing such a precedent and such a system, and of the possibly resultant trade complications, and not by the act of an executive officer proceeding merely on the strength of a doubtful interpretation of an unconsidered clause in an annual appropriation act.

The step contemplated by Secretary Wilson is too important in its indirect consequences to be undertaken without intelligent consideration and definite authorization by the legislature.

We therefore think that by all means the wisest thing for the Secretary to do is to defer taking to the matter of giving even a small bounty to the fruit-exporting business, and to present his ideas and recommendations to Congress at the next session.

Have the Boers Exhausted Belligerent Rights?

We are not surprised at the unfavorable comments with which Lord Kitchener's recent proclamation has been received on the Continent of Europe and all combatants who are not Boers. We are not surprised, because we have all along been prepared for such a result. We have been prepared for it because we have been fully aware that the Boers have been fighting a war of extermination against the British Empire, and that the British Government has been forbearing to the last degree in its dealings with the Boers, because it has been unwilling to do anything that might be construed into a violation of the rules of civilized warfare