

THE PANAMA CANAL QUESTION.

BY THE EDITOR.

ONE of the international problems prominent in our politics to-day is the question of the toll for American ships through the Panama Canal and the meaning of the Hay-Pauncefote treaty. It seems that both our Solons and our diplomats have acted rashly, the former in passing a bill according to which American ships engaged in coastwise trade shall pass through the canal free; the latter in making treaties which prove to be traps. The bill concerning the Panama Canal toll bestows an unusual privilege upon one class of the people, and there is a principle in government that favors should not be given to a special class or a special industry or special individuals. Whether the motive of the bill was to favor Americans against Canadians need not be investigated. Be it sufficient to state that it is a bill of singular favoritism, and it ought to be reconsidered and revoked. This might be done without reference to the Hay-Pauncefote treaty, on which, as it is claimed by many experts, the bill is an infringement.

Whether or not the bill is contrary to the Hay-Pauncefote treaty is a question in itself, and we repeat the bill ought to be revoked. But if, on the other hand, the bill indeed violates the treaty, then the treaty ought to be canceled. It is true that if we make a treaty we ought to keep it. If a treaty involves us in the payment of money we ought to pay it, but if a treaty supersedes the sovereignty of our national independence, it indicates that we have suffered a crushing defeat, for we would submit quietly to humiliating conditions only if compelled to yield to a stronger force, and no one would blame us if at the first opportunity we try to regain our independence by shaking off the yoke thus imposed upon us. If the Hay-Pauncefote treaty really implies that the government of the United States forfeits the right to dispose of and administer its

own property, we ought to repudiate the treaty on the risk of going to war for our independence.

It seems clear that Mr. Hay did not understand the treaty in any such sense as submission to English sovereignty. Otherwise he would never have acceded to its terms without being driven thereto by dire necessity. It is true that the Hay-Pauncefote treaty supplants the Clayton-Bulwer treaty, the unacceptability of which had made itself felt. But it now seems that the Hay-Pauncefote treaty is, in intention at least, only a little more favorable than the Clayton-Bulwer treaty, and if this is the case serious steps ought to be taken to redress the wrong which we have foolishly permitted ourselves to suffer.

Geographical points of such vital importance in peace and war cannot be left in an unfortified and unsafe condition on the supposition that all the powers on earth will be so meek and well-intentioned that they would never make use of an advantage by which in case of war they could cripple our offensive and defensive forces. It has always been customary that in case of an intended war any advantage may be taken, and it would be lamentable for the United States if suddenly some strong power would pounce on the canal, seize it, and retain it. No peace congress, no idealists, no committee of international judges can change these conditions. It is a law of nature, and we can as little legislate against it or abolish it by treaty or arbitration as we can abolish thunderstorms or hurricanes.

The Hay-Pauncefote treaty demands that the canal should be rigorously neutral, but it appears to be understood that it shall have to be fortified, for it would be a gross neglect if the United States would trust too much in the general good-will of the warlike powers.

If the Hay-Pauncefote treaty really deprives the United States of the right to administer her own property, it ought to be canceled, and this ought to be done at once, the sooner the better. It should be done frankly, freely and openly by declaring that the whole treaty was a mistake, that it infringes upon the dignity of the United States and that its abolition is tantamount to a reassertion of our independence.

While we thus advocate the canceling of the bill to allow free passage of the American coastwise ships through the canal we at the same time insist that the Hay-Pauncefote treaty ought to be plainly and unequivocally interpreted in a broad sense that would not involve a surrender of American independence, or if that be not conceded by the other contracting party, it ought to be unreservedly renounced.