

## The Neutrality Question at Washington.

In the present aspect of the domestic and international questions in the minor countries south of us it is not remarkable that the Cabinet at Washington finds itself sorely puzzled how to shape its policy under the encumbrances of the existing neutrality laws. Cuba now presents two governments to the world, each with a valid claim to recognition. The island of St. Domingo, divided between the negroes of Hayti and the mixed population of the Dominican republic, offers four, if not five, claimants to legitimacy as the ruling power. Mexico, with a larger territorial scope, is again on the verge of domestic revolution. Among all the contestants the only apparent ground for stability of rule is found in the recognition by and active sympathy of the United States. The result of our own civil war and its application in the case of Juarez has made this evident to the world.

Accordingly we find President Cespedes and the Spanish Minister at Washington; President Baez and the agents of Cabral, who is said to be again afoot in St. Domingo; Emperor Salnave, and General Domingue, of Southern Hayti, and others whose schemes are less prominently developed as yet, all pulling their wires round Mr. Secretary Fish and puzzling his honest and slow Knickerbocker brains, rendering his latter days miserable. Popular sympathy and the national interest combine on one side, and the stipulations of the neutrality laws are appealed to on the other. No man can fail to see—and, therefore, the entire Cabinet perceive—that if the present complications in the American Mediterranean are forced or even allowed to develop in a manner antagonistic to our permanent interests, the administration will lose its hold on the respect of the country and acquire a merited weight of popular obloquy.

The difficulties in the case are in no small degree enhanced by the past practices of members of the Cabinet to use the neutrality laws as a means for defeating the aims of rivals. Thus in the well known case of the steamer Massachusetts, during the administration of General Pierce, Marcy, as Secretary of State, availed himself of the tribunals to defeat the schemes of Jeff Davis, who was Secretary of War. The neutrality laws have been used also by political partizans to frustrate rival parties, as was evident under President Fillmore's administration, and they are to-day relied upon by a set of copperhead politicians who, when in power, were hot for their repeal to thwart the administration of General Grant and prevent its gathering of an overwhelming popular support, by imitating a policy which shall contemplate the admission to the Union of Cuba, St. Domingo and Mexico, and solving at an early day the practical formula of this great advance in our national march.

There is but one safe course for the Cabinet to adopt in this dilemma. It must abandon the petty paths which have been trod by its predecessors, and which have led the United States government into the anomalous position of being a constabulary force for the minor despotisms of America and converted the neutrality act into a parochial relief law. The act itself is a remnant of our national weakness during the early days of the government, and should have been modified long since to make it conform more truly to the development of our national power and the spirit of our age. The Cabinet cannot repeal the law, but it can modify the practice of its interpretation to such a degree as to relieve it from the dilemma in which the government now finds itself of having to decide on the opposing representations of two foreign Ministers accredited to Washington. The spirit of the law never contemplated the conversion of our power into a safeguard for effete and rejected forms, and much less into an instrument for private wrong.

This interpretation will necessarily be modified by the course of circumstances and the moral relations which exist with surrounding States. The law of nations is itself continually modified by circumstances and the changing forms of national development, and it can never undertake to do more than to define the moral relations which exist between ourselves and our neighbors. It is these which the Cabinet must consider, and if it will do so in an enlarged and enlightened spirit that consideration will lead it to the adoption of a truly American policy and statesmanship which will be in accord with the permanent interests of peace and command the respect of European Cabinets. The law and the practice of every European Power recognizes the right of citizens of neutral States to take service under a belligerent nation, and traffic in arms, ships and munitions of war is held to be no violation of the rights of neutrals if the traffic is not denied to either belligerent. It is only the act of Congress passed during a period of national childhood and timidity that makes the exercise of both of these rights a misdemeanor, punishable by fine and imprisonment. We look to Mr. Hoar for an opinion on this important question, which shall be framed in the true spirit of the moral obligations of neighboring nations, and which shall relieve our government from the degrading and disgusting position of preserver of the claims of every wornout and dying system with which the courtesies of diplomatic intercourse may have led us into relations,