

## International Law & Neutrality

**Thomas Willing Balch, a letter to the New York Sun, an influential American paper, concerning a dispute over transit of the Panama Canal between the US and Great Britain, 1912**

A half century ago, Americans believed firmly that we had a good cause of grievance against Great Britain for having allowed, during our great Civil War, the use of her ports for the fitting out of a fleet of Confederate cruisers, which caused our maritime flag to disappear almost entirely from the high seas. We pressed Great Britain long and persistently to agree that our claims, known under the generic name of the Alabama claims, should be submitted for settlement to an impartial arbitration. Finally, with reluctance, Great Britain acceded to our demands. And as a result the two Nations appeared as litigants before the Bar of the International Court of Justice, popularly known as the Geneva Tribunal. The result was a triumph for the United States, but also it was a greater triumph for the cause of civilization. The Alabama Arbitration which involved a large and important part of the rights and duties of neutrals and belligerents towards one another, was a notable advance in strengthening the power and majesty of International Law among the Nations of the world. The present dispute will turn on the correct interpretation of a treaty concerning whose meaning various parties and persons have offered different views. It seems to be clearly a case for a judicial decision. At the proper time, let the question be argued before The Hague Court, and whatever the decision may be, which both parties will be pledged in advance to accept, another triumph will have been won for the Law of the Nations. Another step forward—and International Law and Justice can only advance a step at a time—towards the distant goal of universal peace through the expansion of the Law of Nations will be accomplished to the substantial gain and credit of civilization and humanity. And new honor and glory will accrue to the United States, which ever since the signing of Jay's Treaty in 1794\* have done so much, probably more than any other Power, to promote the cause of justice among the Nations.

\* Jay's Treaty in 1794- On November 19, 1794 representatives of the United States and Great Britain signed Jay's Treaty, which sought to settle outstanding issues between the two countries that had been left unresolved since American independence. The treaty proved unpopular with the American public but did accomplish the goal of maintaining peace between the two nations and preserving U.S. neutrality.

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