

A DARK CHAPTER IN AMERICAN LEGISLATION.

C. R. WELDEN.

In May last the press of this country announced that the Chinese exclusion bill had passed congress, and had received the signature of the President. The great mass of our people read the announcement and passed it by with little thought. They did not realize that an act had been passed of so great import; so far reaching in its effects. The United States had violated her treaty with China. She had passed a law new and strange to a free government.

There are certain conditions under which a nation is justified in abrogating a treaty. Self preservation is the first law of nations as well as of individuals. If the coming of Chinese to this country threatened the interests of our people; if Chinese immigration was a growing evil which endangered the safety of our national institutions; if China, knowing these things had refused to make a new treaty, then Congress was justified in her action. If, on the other hand, these things did not exist, must we not admit that the United States stands before the world convicted of an injustice toward a weaker nation?

The question of foreign immigration is today a vital one. It is a question which excites the grave apprehension of the American people. It is a question which demands and is receiving the attention of our greatest statesmen. While the United States has always been, and I trust always will be, a refuge for the oppressed of despotic governments, yet it will never consent to be the refuge for the paupers, the criminals, the anarchists of the Old World. But while our government is legislating in regard to immigration and seeking to protect our citizens, is it not possible that it may go too far in some cases, and discriminate unjustly against a certain people?

The discovery of gold in California attracted not only the people of the United States but of the world. Soon the Pacific

coast was alive with settlements made by people drawn there by the hope of becoming rich. The territory of California on account of the rapid increase of population soon became a state.

Far to the west of this new state, across the Pacific, lay the empire of China; an empire containing almost half the population of the globe; which had existed for fifty centuries. While the races of the west had come and gone leaving scarcely an imprint to mark their existence; amidst the wonderful changes that had characterized the rest of the world, the blending of races, of languages, the formation of new nations with higher types of civilization, the Chinese race had existed and had come down the ages unchanged by any external influence, with the same government, the same religion, the same customs. The policy of this people had been one of seclusion and exclusion. The resources of their broad empire enabled them to live independently of other countries. This they desired to do and did. The nations of the world imbued with the spirit of modern civilization brought to bear their physical and moral forces against this wall of seclusion. It yielded, and a few ports, for ages sealed, were opened to foreign commerce.

Foremost among the nations that sought intercourse with China was the United States. A commerce with that country might be developed which would prove profitable. On the Pacific coast the rewards of mining made the white man's labor too costly for ordinary purposes, and the people desired the immigration of Chinese laborers in order that they might do the menial work.

In 1868 the United States negotiated with China the famous Burlingame treaty. This caused great rejoicing throughout the United States, and was regarded as the greatest triumph of modern diplomacy. The treaty is remarkable in some respects, remarkable