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EDITORIAL

AS TO PANAMA.

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ALTHOUGH the speech by John F. Wallace, former chief engineer of the Panama Canal, delivered at the smoker of the Canadian Club in this city on March 12, was a timely summary of the series of political intrigues which preceded "The Steal," the summary was defective in one respect. It omitted to co-ordinate two items, without which co-ordination only an imperfect conception can be formed of that "most glorious of all Roosevelt's policies," as the Colonel's admirers love to designate the Canal affair.

Mr. Wallace touched upon the fact that, although what the French Company held was practically of no value worth mentioning, the Company was bought out by the United States for the gross sum of \$40,000,000. In another place of his speech Mr. Wallace referred to the fact that, sent to Panama as chief engineer, perceiving the great advantages of a sea level canal over the high level, and having advocated the former, he was summarily dismissed, and the high level, or locks system, was resorted to. Have the two facts—the \$40,000,000 presented to the French Company and the decision against the sea level canal—no connection! They are intimately connected.

Bonau-Varilla, himself, the head of the French Company, has stated that he never expected a lock-canal to be built; what he expected to see was a sea level canal, or, as he graphically expresses the idea, "the Straits of Panama." Bonau-Varilla knew what he was talking about.

The Isthmian region is volcanic. Gigantic structures, such as the locks needed by a high level canal, are at any time exposed to be shaken to pieces. Added to this, the exceptionally torrential rainfall of the region, generating the torrential sweeps of the Chagres River, and capable of undermining almost any artificial structure, combine to condemn the high level and lock-canal scheme as unwise. The material

conditions dictate sea-level, in other words, “the Straits of Panama,” as Mr. Wallace sets forth.

All this notwithstanding, the latter was rejected, the former adopted. Why?

The “Straits of Panama,” that is, the cutting of the Straits, was a vastly more stupendous undertaking. For one thing, the estimated expense would have been so much larger that, it was feared, popular parsimony would throw the weight of popular opinion against the entire canal idea; for another thing, the time within which the plan could be carried out would be at least triple that within which the high level canal could be promised. Planted upon these considerations, all the financial and mercantile interests, which saw hundreds of thousands of profits for themselves in the construction of the Canal, centered their forces upon the high level plan. The acceptance of the sea level canal was too problematical a proposition. The acceptance of the high level was more easily encompassed, especially with the aid of a “publicity bureau” which was to attend to prompting public opinion “for the Canal.”

Of course, the high level or lock canal was liable to break down long before completion—what of it? That would afford an outlet for more goods to be sold and more moneys to be invested. Of course, even after completion, the high level locks might any day be earthquaked and Chagres-Rivered into the bottom of the Canal—what of it? It would not cancel the sales made and moneys bonded.

Such were the forces that caused the squelching of the sea level, or Straits plan, together with the chief engineer who counselled it. Those who panted for the immediate payment of the \$40,000,000, of course, added their impetus in the same direction.

And thus the novel spectacle was seen of solid material financial interests planted upon unsolid material conditions in Nature, setting on foot the most stupendous fraud of the Age.

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