



Speech of Mr. Holmes, of Maine, Delivered in the Senate of the United States, on the Mission to Panama (Classic Reprint)

John Holmes

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Excerpt from Speech of Mr. Holmes, of Maine, Delivered in the Senate of the United States, on the Mission to Panama

Were I not to know this I should be stupid indeed. But of the nature, character, or extent of the mission, and the powers and duties of the deputies to be sent, I am as utterly in the dark as was Nichodemus when he was told that, "except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." But, sir, there is even some consolation in this state of uncertainty. I have fewer of those alarming fears or ardent hopes which appear to agitate others. Not knowing the nature or the extent of the object, I cannot foresee its consequences-and I could safely repose on the maxim, "if one cannot clearly see where to go, nor what to do, it is best to stand still and do nothing" And there is a further consolation, in finding that I am not alone in this state of comfortable uncertainty, but in very good company.

Two gentlemen, of transcendent talents, and great political experience, have advocated the measure. Wishing for light, I listened to them with intense interest; but to my utter disappointment, they, so far from defining the character and objects of this Congress, disagreed as to both. With one it was not belligerent, because it was seeking peace by arms and managing a defensive war. With the other, it has no power to touch the political condition of Cuba-the principal subject in which we can have any interest. And yet this gentleman would send Ministers to prevent their doing, what, he says, they have no power to do; just as the President would send them to prevent the Spanish American Nations from conceding to Spain any commercial privileges, as the price of their independence, when, by their treaties before us, they have jointly, and severally, and solemnly stipulated that they will make no such concessions.

The President, indeed, seems to be involved in the same uncertainty. When the invitation was first given he, with that wisdom and prudence for which he has been so much celebrated, required, as a preliminary, that "the precise questions" to be discussed, "the powers of the deputies," the "organization of the Congress," and the effect of its decisions, should be first understood.

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