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### *For the Canal*

Great legislation comes of great legislators therefore, it is never to be expected. When we get it we have to thank either the right instinct of the people or the contagion of some great example in the legislative body. The average legislator is a person of short and narrow views, incapable of enthusiasms and devoid of prevision, though not altogether inaccessible to the light and fire of a masterful intellect dowered with the prophetic imagination that is lacking in himself.

With such an intellect in each House of Congress today we should have before the present session closes an isthmian canal bill that would secure American dominance of all possible isthmian waterways for all time to come. We should have possession of both the only routes now deemed practicable, with everything in train for immediate work upon the one of our first choice.

They are not to be condemned, these gentlemen of the narrow vision; it is not given to many to see beyond their noses and their shoulders. Where men like Webster stumble it is to be expected that smaller and feebler men will fall and go lame. Webster declared the entire western half of our continent a desert region unfit for human habitation; can we hope that the distinguished statesman from Little Kneedeep will see in his mind's eye the Pacific white with sails and freaked with the wakes of electric liners? The need of the present is an Isthmian canal; that of the near future is two.

The highest and rarest form of wisdom is that of him who foretells events. "In the early 60s," as a correspondent reminds me, "it was doubted if a transcontinental railroad would pay, and the generous subsidies offered by the Government remained long unaccepted. Now, after the lapse of less than forty years, there are six, with more in course of construction or projected." It has pleased Heaven to preserve many of the doubters and all but one of their doubts.

For generations successive congresses have shivered on the bring of their imaginary canal, as if it were a financial strait; and still they shiver. The cost appals—the sum of a year's pensions! If some railway company had authority to cut that canal, and if its interest lay in construction, the needful money would be voted forthwith, and never a reference to constituencies of stockholders. A few weeks ago, if memory serves, the directors of a railway company voted an appropriation of two hundred million dollars for the mere betterment of their roadway. What a single corporation—one of dozens—lightly expends in repairs the richest nation of the world withholds from a project promising the most stupendous, political and commercial advantages that ever fired the imagination of a statesman or rewarded the faith of a people.

There is a possibility of canal legislation this session, but it is a possibility only. If we do not get it we shall hear a deal about the all-powerful overland railway lobby that chinked its dishonest gold in the dark corners of the Capitol, and so forth. It will not be true. There is, and has been, no such lobby at work here in Washington. I have heard the assertion made a score of

times by those who would naturally be supposed to know and a score of times have asked in vain for evidence. It is easy to shout bribery and corruption, but, in fact, the number of men in Congress open to a dishonest proposal is too small to make it worth while to purchase them. If the Nicaragua Canal bill fails of passage it will not be because of corruption, but because of stupidity; not through the lack of honesty, but through the lack of imagination. The House of Representatives if all right; it had its mandate from the people and the bill was passed with only two dissenting votes. If permitted by political exigency to come to a vote in the Senate it will pass there if a majority of the respectable, elderly gentlemen composing that body are capable of a look forward to the time when the Pacific Ocean will be an American lake, studded with great and rich American cities on both sides. Within one century of today that will indubitably be the situation, and it seems to me that about the only persons who have a realizing sense of it are the long-headed and hard-fisted men now engaged in pushing new railroads toward that golden goal.

Washington, April 5<sup>th</sup>.