

Article Title: The Floridas. From the London Morning Chronicle. Long article speculating that Spain will indemnify its war debts to Great Britain by ceding West and East Florida; but this cession holds little appeal and could lead to war with the U.S. again.

Author:

Published in: National Intelligencer

Place of Publication: Washington, DC

Publication Date: 11/25/1815

THE FLORIDAS From the London Morning Chronicle, Sept. 21.

It was natural to expect, after a war like that of the Peninsula, in which so much British blood and treasure were exhausted, that the subject of indemnities would come on the carpet, as soon as the object was attained and peace established. It was a very difficult matter, however, to settle this point, in consequence of the indefinite terms of the treaty made by Mr. Canning, and the difficulty of treating with Ferdinand and his ministers, who, far from being prepared to give an indemnity, rather thought we had done more harm than good in aiding to liberate the Peninsula, and would have been happy if an Englishman had never trod their ground. Hence, by every means in their power, are they now trying to undo what little, social as well as political, improvements we sought to introduce, and it will be no wonder, if in the next edict issued by the inquisition, it be deemed a crime of heretical pravity, for a Spaniard to be heard speaking English. This indemnity question, consequently, has met with great difficulties, as well for the reasons just assigned as because the services to be compensated were performed to the cortes, and it would be very inconsistent, after his past conduct, for Ferdinand to seek to remunerate them, and indeed he only knows of them by hearsay.

Under this state of things it is easy to conceive the great dilemma in which the ministers have been placed, as well as their worthy representatives in Madrid, who have not learned logic enough to undo the syllogisms and other knotty arguments the monastic counselors of Ferdinand bring forward on this subject. This indemnity question was, however, warmly agitated in Madrid, in November last, and the whole weight and influence of England at last wrested from the tenacious Spaniards, it is generally believed, an indemnity, viz. East and West Florida. It is generally supposed that several demands were made before this point was agreed on, viz. a free trade to Spanish America. The cotton trade of Spain, the Island of Puerto Rico, the Spanish part of St. Domingo, Cuba, the Balcares, Canaries, and for what we know, the Phillipine Islands. Either of these bonuses, separately, might, perhaps, have satisfied our wishes, but the Spaniards were too wise to let one go ; so it would seem as if he had been forced to be content with the Floridas, because Spain could retain them no longer on account of the North Americans and the neighboring revolutions of Mexico. In making this concession, however, it is not clear, whether some valuable principle has not been given up, and whether some condition has not been exacted from us, opposed to the feelings and wishes of the people of England. Time will enlighten us on this point a little more, but in Spanish America, we ought to remember, there is at present a general insurrection against tyrannical power, a strong and irresistible impulse of human nature groaning under oppression, a revolution, in short, the most just and interesting in its nature as well as its consequences to the world, to be found in the annals of history.

To suppress this revolution, we know that the inquisition has been armed with the bayonet and the dagger, that religion has been prostituted, and that all the energies of rancor and malice have been set to work. To suppress this revolution also Spain has frequently called upon England, under a plea, that in our treaty we had guaranteed the integrity of the Spanish monarchy. It would be long and tedious to carry our readers through the various occasions in which Spain has urged England to interfere and decide against her ultramarine provinces, but this treaty has even, by the agents of the latter, been interpreted into the right of demanding the persons of Spanish Americans landing in England. It has hitherto been thought that these remonstrances, on the part of Spain, have been unnoticed, but in our last treaty there is an additional clause, inserted on August 24, 1814, as the 3d

additional article, whereas the body of the same is signed on 5th July, same year, which has created some alarm. It is as follows :

" His Britannic majesty being anxious that the troubles and disturbances which unfortunately prevail in the dominions of his catholic majesty in America should cease, and the subjects of these provinces should return to their obedience to their lawful sovereign, engages to take the most effectual measures for preventing his subjects from furnishing arms, ammunition, or any other warlike article to the revolted in America."

To this another circumstance of a more important nature has lately been added, tending to prove that some change has taken place in the policy of England, which in the last parliament was pledged to be strictly, nay delicately, neutral between Spain and her ultramarine provinces. If so, it is now generally asked, can this be in consequence of the cession of the Floridas to England ? Can we have bartered our honor, our national foresight, and integrity, together with our mercantile interests, for this bauble ? Let us look for a moment on the real merits of this gift on the part of Spain and what will accrue to us, by being made lords over the Floridas.

We are not aware, that from time to time, long and elaborate memoirs have been presented to government, on the subject of the Floridas, since we held possession of that country, so there have also been respecting the cutting of the Isthmus of Panama, and in all probability they have been on a par. They have been represented as Dorados, or the Elysian fields, and commercial avidity has delineated a comparative desert into a magnificent vent for goods. Yet it is a fact, that the soil of West Florida is sandy, and that the climate is unhealthy, as our experience taught us from the year 1763, till we gave it up, which we even seem to have been glad to do. Neither East nor West Florida supply furs, for the game is extinct, nor are there Indians now to hunt or consume goods. West Florida has indeed some advantages of locality, from being the channel to the sea of a large and fertile tract of country extending from the 31 degree to the sources of the Pearl, Alabama, and Chatahoche rivers ; but all this belongs to the United States, and hitherto these rivers have scarcely been used. East Florida possesses no harbors ; and indeed the population of both is so extremely thin, that, as commercial and agricultural points, they cannot present an advantage worth the expense of keeping them. They have long been a burden to Spain, who had annually to draw from Mexico 151,000 dollars for their expense of administration. Spain, therefore rids herself of a load, for she is sensible that the inhabitants, who endure all the horrors of Spanish legislation, c. without either protection or benefits, and behold the rise of Louisiana since its cession to the United States, will not be long before they wish to form part of the same confederation. Nay, this dread of progressive liberty has long given umbrage to the cabinet of Madrid ; for this they owe an old grudge to the North Americans, as well as for aiding the revolutions of the Mexicans ; but as Spain is too feeble to retaliate, she is now glad to get England to do it for her.

Spain, therefore, in making us masters of the Floridas, would give what to her is scarcely worth keeping, and indeed what she cannot keep long ; and we seem to think, that what is worth giving, is worth having. But our possession of the above country seems to be founded on the advantages of a military position, and as a future bridle of United States. On this score it deserves particular attention.

Beaujour, in his sketch of the United States, a work that certainly develops the views and situation of that country better than any other before published, says " that the Floridas to the south, appear sooner or later, destined to be united to the American republic, since they form part of the boundaries delineated by nature." The government, as well as the people of the U. States, have the same idea ; and if England takes possession of that country, they are persuaded it is solely for the purpose of being a thorn in their side, to annoy them in time of war, and counter-balance any attack they may wish to make to the north. Mr. Ellicot, who in some years back measured the boundary line between Spain and the United States, observed, " that West Florida must be highly important in a commercial point of view, and, if connected with the country north of it, capable of prescribing maritime regulations to the Gulph of Mexico." That is giving to understand, that in the hands of the United States, and as an outlet to the sea for a great part of the Mississippi Territory and Upper Carolina, and connected with a fertile range of country, in a rapid state of progression, it might be made of great

consequence ; but these advantages could never be realized by Spain or England, as solitary possessions of a strip of sea coast, and shut out from the interior. Besides, it is only when these back countries are settled and cultivated, that these advantages are to be realized ; and this is indeed the material reason why the United States are not possessed of them already. Yet their holding them certainly enters into the future views of the United States ; and being so near, with the population in their favor, it is evident they can take them whenever they choose. It is, therefore, when we have laid out large sums in barracks, new cities, (for our garrisons can never be put into Pensacola and Mobile, once the tomb of our countrymen,) and in other necessary objects to make an establishment, that the United States' back-woods-men will sound their bugle, at the first symptoms of war, and all our trouble and expense will be lost.

Whatever then be the consideration we give for the Floridas, it can only be viewed in the light of a bad debt, for which we get what we can ; but when we come to consider that this must be the cause of a new war with the United States, sooner or later, if we can get nothing better, would it not be more advisable to dash the sponge over our debt against Spain, than hereafter endanger the Canadas ? By the war out of which we have just emerged with the United States, we have given that country a tone of importance greater than it would have attained by thirty years' growth, and certainly its inhabitants will never henceforward endure what they have been in the habits of hitherto bearing. The possession of the Floridas can, consequently, bring upon us nothing but a war, and if obtained by the sacrifice of any principle dear to the feelings of Englishmen, and essential to our trade, disgrace must be the issue. It is then necessary for us to look narrowly into this affair, before the meeting of Parliament, for in it many of the vital interests of this country are implicated. It indeed seems to be the lot of nations, to derive no instruction but from experience, nor, nowadays, do they avail themselves of the past folly of their neighbors. Absorbed as we are in modeling Europe to our wishes, North and South America seem to be entirely neglected, or, if thought of, merely to destroy the future prospects a combination of fortunate circumstances has presented. Sufficient gall has already been infused into the minds of the North American people ; their manifesto respecting the late war, and particularly some of its detached features, have been rancorous enough ; and if we purchase from Spain a country for the purpose of fomenting dissensions in the bordering States, and placing a barrier to the independence of South America, we create a sympathetic feeling throughout, of which our children may experience the fatal consequences.