

CAN THE FIRST COMER TAKE PANAMA?



By CUSHING STETSON

ILLUSTRATIONS BY G.W. HARTING

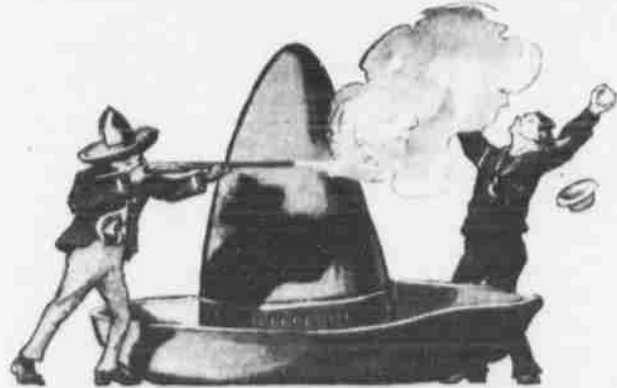
THIS ARTICLE is not flattering to American foresight and business sense. But it sounds a patriotic warning. Furthermore, it has the approval and virtual endorsement of leading American naval authorities. The author, in fact, was recently with the Atlantic fleet at Panama and Mexico by authority of the Navy Department. Admiral Dewey declares: "Mr. Stetson has succeeded in presenting in readable form a conception of present conditions and a forecast of future events that merit careful consideration on the part of the intelligent public."

Another high official in the navy says: "You dismiss the Japanese situation too easily. If war came with Japan it would tax the stability of purpose of the American people, for it would not end by any act of Japan until Japan was financially ruined."

"We of the navy view with the gravest concern the growing German fleet and our corresponding slowness of increase in naval power. From now on we may expect a close scrutiny, a more critical attitude, on the part of Germany, toward all that bears on the conduct of Latin American affairs. . . . Not long ago a prominent German official stated in private conversation that German naval activity was directed, not at England, but at America."—The Editor.

SHALL THE UNITED STATES, as a distinguished Senator has suggested, build a wall along the waters of the Rio Grande, and forget everything that lies on the other side? In a region where we have just spent \$330,000,000 on a Canal which is the envy and desire of every State of Europe, shall we permit the same conditions of anarchy to go on which we have ignored since 1821? What precipitated the occupation of Northern Africa by England and France but just those conditions which we have at our doors; and shall our policy make it necessary in the end for a European State to intervene, and to occupy and police Central America? The Monroe Doctrine says to the world: "Hands off! We will do the policing ourselves." But if we do not?

These questions we must settle for ourselves, or they will soon, and rightly, be answered for us. The Canal has centered attention on Latin America as never before. Capital seeking investment can not be indefinitely debarred from the untold mineral wealth of Nicaragua, the vast sugar lands of Guatemala, the grazing lands, unsurpassed in the world, of Southern Mexico. And capital will bring the policeman. Indeed, European, and chiefly German capital, is already heavily involved. The Mexican National Railroad alone, with a capital of \$230,000,000 is largely German owned. German ships share chiefly with England a monopoly of the Caribbean trade. The German dreadnaught fleet, second only to the British, outnumbers that of the United States by nearly two to one. The population of Germany, with a tremendous birth rate and already overcrowded, seeks an outlet for German enterprise and thrift. The United States now stands at the parting of the ways. When Germany shall at length decide to protect her capital, this country having failed to do so, what will the outcome be of conflict between the two? Which will have the Canal?



Murdered in Mexico. Who remembers the incident?

Recently the United States battleship Georgia, followed by the Nebraska and Vermont, steamed into the

harbor of Vera Cruz. The Captain of a Mexican gunboat on being asked what he would do in the event of hostilities replied: "The bigger the ship the better the target. One shot from my guns, pouf! and the American ships will follow the Maine to the bottom." His reply gave general satisfaction and confirmed the popular view. "As an example of American boasting," said another of the company, a prominent surgeon in Vera Cruz, "they say they load their guns with 1,200 pound shells. No man could even lift such a shell."

THE ships had been expected to land a force. They did not. For weeks they lay half a mile or so outside the breakwater, where, as a matter of fact, other ships are now lying, until what had been a belief became a conviction that the Americans were afraid, and their presence a bluff. While Americans were stopping bullets in the City of Mexico, the bluejackets were forbidden to land, for fear of disturbance. And next, while every American refugee brought in new tales of murder and pillage, and the daily papers heralded the burning of American-owned railroad bridges, came the note from Washington declaring the United States would not intervene. The Mexicans grew civil. Americans had been the only foreigners killed; it was clear they were not to be feared, their money was good. Considering which, the only point to emphasize is this: Should the United States in future undertake any military operations against Mexico, that country would be stupefied with amazement.

It turns out to be the same old story. Every peasant in Spain, every caballero in Madrid was amazed that a nation of "shop-keepers and drummers" whom their newspapers had described as "pigs," and "without honor," should prevail at Manila and Santiago. The rule holds good of greater nations than Spain, and a fool's paradise of fancied security has generally preceded a nation's ruin by some power held previously in contempt. The Russians cared little in 1898 for the pretensions of the Japanese, counting confidently on their vast war chest, the immense resources of their country with its millions of inhabitants, and an available army of more than a million men. Port Arthur, considered by the Russians impregnable, stood for centuries of achievement and triumphant progress toward an open port on the Pacific, with the same hold on the Russian as the Panama Canal has now on the American imagination. The Russians, to repeat, thought themselves invincible; and dear to the American heart, ingrained in its very fiber, is the belief, also, that in war the United States would prove invincible.

WHICH may be justified. But it is at least true that those great captains who in the past have won victories cared little for such beliefs; and that such of them as chose to put the principles by which they conquered into words, are found in astonishing agreement as to certain principles in war. They have insisted on (1) Preparedness at all times for war; (2) Initiative in catching your enemy unprepared; (3) Thoroughness in making victory complete. By preparedness is meant an army disciplined and drilled, commensurate with the wealth of the country; and not only men and ships, but a sufficiency of ships well officered and manned, and, since a battleship can no longer come and go at will, like the sailing ships of old, but must reckon the miles she can steam by the coal in her bunkers, they would have meant coaling stations with colliers and supply ships, and stations where a fleet can be repaired.

Considering the army as well as the navy, America is not on an equal footing with any first-class power. And the future is not bright in the matter of guaranteeing such military and naval expansion as our growing responsibilities and commercial power demand. With every decade of (Continued on Page 12)

