

ERRORS OF PEACE—AND WAR

People are justified in speaking of the mistakes of Mr. Wilson's Mexican policy, if a mistaken policy is one which does not go like a bullet straight to its aim. Delays, disappointments, irritations, petty humiliations at the hands of a Huerta or a Villa, injuries wrought to American lives and property, have marked the administration's policy. Instead of flying straight to its aim it has fumbled, stumbled, retreated, sought roundabout ways—let us put it as severely as any critic of the president may be tempted to. But when people find themselves chafing at the delays and setbacks of a policy which has for its great aim the maintenance of peace, does it ever occur to them to compare the tribulations of a peace policy with the tribulations of its alternative—a war policy? For that matter, in what field of human endeavor—in legislation, in industry, in scientific research, in literature, in art—is there a line of progress that marches straight to its aim, that has not its postponements, its burning disappointments, its half-successes, its compromises? If peace between neighboring nations is worth preserving, if it is worth while to take measures against plunging this country into the perilous new problems that lie in the weeks of a war of conquest, if—to put it specifically—the things that Mr. Wilson is trying to get are worth striving for, why dwell upon the mistakes of a policy which are infinitesimal in comparison with the inevitable mistakes of its only alternative policy?

People who speak so easily of armed intervention in Mexico must be cherishing some such mental picture as this: A powerful statesman, who has planned out every move ahead, who has determined just how far the war should carry him and not an inch further, no matter what happens; a Napoleonic commander-in-chief who has figured out every battle and every skirmish and every life that will be lost, and has determined that the lives lost will be the exact price for the purpose to be attained; armies marching smoothly towards their objective cities and fortresses falling by schedule; food and ammunition trains working with mathematical precision—no oversights, no surprises, no blundering—the triumph of mind over circumstance. This was the holiday spirit in which England set out on a few weeks' drive against the Boers; this was the spirit of which the Russian bureaucracy went to war against Japan; this, in a fashion, was the enthusiastic spirit of the north when it set out to capture Richmond in a few weeks of fighting. The wars in which there have been no mistakes are few—or none. Even a Moltke probably found that things did not go altogether by schedule.

A statesman leads his country into war. The die is cast. The nation's honor is engaged. He blithely sends forth a couple of divisions on what he considers an easy undertaking. And within two weeks the game may be out of his hands. The fortnight's campaign develops into a war of months and years. Of course, there is no stopping it. The nation pours forth its lives and its wealth unhesitatingly, with a fiercer spirit of vengeance and determination as the task grows more difficult. Already the price paid surpasses the value of the object stricken for, surpasses anything that the country imagined it would have to sacrifice. The country may recognize that a mistake has been made, but that will not alter the situation. The issue must be fought out, even though the object of the war has been lost sight of. National honor must be vindicated and what if mistakes have been made—mistakes which have been paid for in

thousands of lives, in enormous waste of wealth, in an aftermath of misery and hatreds and harrassing internal problems. People reason that war is war, and there is no inclination to go into the bookkeeping of deaths and injuries, widows and orphans, national debts and crushing taxes.

But such is human nature that, whereas the statesman who seeks to further the interests of the country by war will not be called to account for ten thousand deaths, the statesman who seeks to further the interests of his country by the maintenance of peace will be scolded and called to account for every bandit outrage, for every secret assassination. A statesman may waste a hundred millions in a useless war without suffering anything like the opprobrium that falls on the man who spends a million dollars for peace. Take war. If a Bulgarian statesman had stood forth and declared that the war was not necessary, how savagely he would have been criticised for every mistake in his policy! Every order incident would have been cited against him, every move by Greece and Servia would have been characterized as an unbearable affront. So Bulgaria went to war, and the "mistakes" of that policy cost her the greater part of Turkish conquests, cost her the slaughter of tens of thousands, cost her untold misery extending over the years.

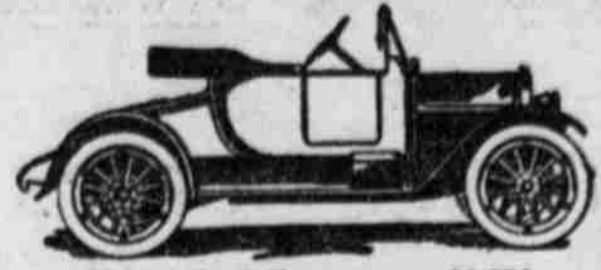
There is a ready answer, of course. No nation considers any price too

high for the defense of its honor and its ultimate destiny. But how if a policy of peace is the policy dictated by national honor and our true destiny? How many people in this country desire the over-running of Mexico? On the other hand, how many people in this country fail to recognize that war with Mexico would mean the opening up of vast and dangerous problems which we are in no condition to attempt. Yet recog-

nizing all this, people chafe because Mr. Wilson's "mistakes" have cost—admitting that Mr. Wilson is responsible—the lives of a score of American citizens and the loss of some millions in property. Mr. Wilson, working for a great purpose, is censured for "mistakes" that have cost less than nations have gladly expended in a week's campaign against some petty barbarian chieftain in Africa.—New York Evening Post.



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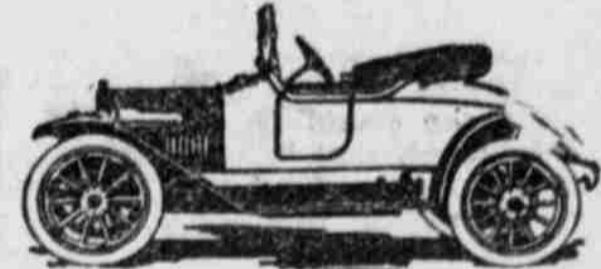
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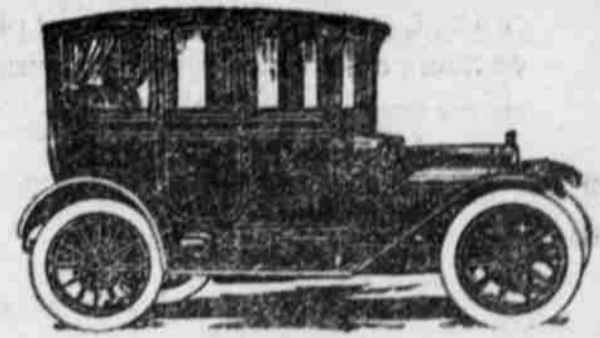
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