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The President's Mexican Policy.

Presented in an Authorized Interview by Secretary of the Interior, Franklin K. Lane

PART II.

By HENRY N. HALL

(From the New York World, Sunday, July 16.)

"Those who are familiar with the feeling of the South and Central American countries toward the United States know that just at that time when our forces occupied Vera Cruz, a very intense fear had seized upon Latin America. They believed in their hearts that we were on our march southward and that the president's Mobile speech and other generous utterances of the same sort were to be taken in a Pickwickian sense.

"When they presented a plan of mediation the United States had no choice but to accept it. Indeed, if we had refused to accept it, Latin America would have been justified in doubting our good faith. No one that I am aware of, either Republican or Democrat, has ever criticized the president for accepting the mediation of Argentina, Brazil and Chili, and abiding strictly by the agreement reached at Niagara Falls.

"By the protocols there signed on June 23, 1914, the United States agreed that the selection of a provisional and a constitutional president be left wholly to the Mexicans, and we guaranteed our recognition of them when chosen. This made clear our desire not to interfere in any way in the settlement of Mexico's domestic troubles, and as a further proof of our disinterested friendship for the Mexican people the United States agreed not to claim any war indemnity or other international satisfaction from Mexico. We had gone to Vera Cruz "to serve mankind." Our only quarrel was with Huerta, and Huerta got out on July 15, 1914. Our forces were withdrawn from Vera Cruz on November 23 following.

"Three days' after Huerta left Mexico Villa began levying taxes on his own authority, and it was plain that the successful revolutionists would soon be fighting between themselves. Both Carranza and Villa agreed to a conference at Aguascalientes, and it was stipulated that no soldiers were to be there; but Villa turned up with an armed force that terrorized the convention and prevented it from recognizing Carranza, and in a short while open warfare began between the two factions.

"Villa and Carranza had broken, and there was a double sovereignty claimed even on our border in northern Mexico. Things were going from bad to worse, and it was suggested in the cabinet that there should be some determination by the United States as to which of the rival claimants to power in Mexico as leader of a successful revolution should be recognized as a 'de facto' government.

Why We Are in Mexico.

"Secretary of State Lansing thereupon called a conference of the representatives of Argentina, Brazil, Chili, Bolivia, Uruguay and Guatemala and asked them, from their knowledge of the situation—for a considerable portion of the information in the hands of the United States came through the representatives of those countries in Mexico—to cooperate with him in the determination of the claimant to be recognized. These six Latin-American Catholic countries unanimously recommended the recognition of Carranza, and in furtherance of our Pan-American policy this recognition was at once given by the United States and Latin-America.

"Since Carranza's recognition we have seen Americans who have gone into Mexico on peaceful errands murdered; we have seen our own towns upon the border raided and Americans slain on American soil. These outrages prompted President Wilson to send our own troops into Mexico, and this course can not be otherwise construed than as a recognition of the fact that the de facto government in Mexico recognized by ourselves and by other nations is not fulfilling the duty which one government owes to another.

"We are in Mexico today, and how long we shall stay and how far we shall go depends upon the policy and the power to keep the peace of the Carranza government, but we shall go no further than we have gone until every effort to secure effective Mexican cooperation fails."

Mr. Lane then proceeded to an examination of the principles governing the policy of the United States toward Mexico and of the needs of the Mexican people. He said:

"There are things that a democracy must always be willing to fight for. But what thing is there that any American can say we ought to be willing to fight for in Mexico? Is it because railroads built with American capital have been damaged, that mines have been shut down, or even that American citizens have been killed by outlaws and bandits?

"All those things we can and do very much regret, but who will say that they are great principles for which a democracy should be willing to sacrifice the blood of its sons? Who can formulate out of the whole history of the past six years any other determination than this: That we should resist the temptation to fight where price and interest move us in that direction, and that we should and will fight when we are attacked and when we find no other means by which our interests can be safeguarded and Mexico be given any hope for itself.

"We have been on the edge of war with Mexico several times in the last three years, but each time, before the determination was made that we should discard our hopes, there has opened some way by which reasonable men might expect that Mexico could prove herself able to take care of her own problems. The one man who can justifiably criticise President Wilson for his Mexican policy is the man who honestly believes that Mexico can not be brought to stability of government and responsibility except through the exercise of outside force. That man is consistent, and the only criticism I have to make of him is a criticism of his judgment.

Seeking Mexican Cooperation.

"There is no question that we could easily overrun Mexico. I believe we could do it with a comparatively few men, although we would have a united Mexico against us. There would be no glory in such a war, and there is not one man in 10,000 in this country who really wants such a war. It would be repugnant to every American tradition and would discourage the friendship of every other American nation. Of course we could conquer Mexico, and after a good deal of guerilla warfare we could bring Mexico to a state of quiet.

"Then we could hold her while we administered to her the medicine that we believe she needs. We could have what we call a general cleaning up, the rebuilding of her railroads, of her wagon roads, the construction of sewers for her cities, the enforcement of health regulations and all the other things that go to make up the outward and visible signs of order and good government.

"But don't you see that the peace we would bring would be a peace imposed by force, the government we would give to Mexico would be the kind of government that we have and which makes life tolerable to us in our communities. Its standards would not be Mexican standards, its ideals would not be Mexican ideals, its genius would not be Mexican genius. The moment we withdrew from Mexico there would be a return after a very short time to Mexican standard.

"What Mexico really needs and must be allowed to do is to raise her own standards; it is to give herself a cleaning up by herself. That is bound to take time, but in no other way can Mexico get a government that will be expressive of her own ideals, that will be expressive of some aspiration of her own as to what her civilization should be, and in this we want to be of help to Mexico if she will allow us to do so.

"The Mexican problem as a problem depends upon your attitude toward other peoples. Mexico is a land to conquer, and the Mexican people are a people to be conquered and subordinated and the country and its resources made ours, if you look upon a smaller and less highly civilized country as a proper object of exploitation. On the other hand, Mexico is a country out of which something greater can be made, and the Mexican people are a people who have possibilities and can be helped to become a self-governing nation, and if you take that attitude toward Mexico you are bound to sympathize with their struggle upward.

"In other words, where we find that conditions justify revolution, if we think it our business to go in and work the revolution to our profit, we must condemn the president's policy, but if, where we find conditions justify revolution, we want to give that revolution a chance to work out from the inside, we must hold up his hands.

"What are the things that Mexico needs, Mr. Secretary?" I asked. "What is necessary for a return to peace and order?"

Mr. Lane said:

"The things that Mexico needs are few, but they are fundamental. A land-tax system which will make it impossible to hold great bodies of idle land for selfish reasons and which will make it unnecessary for the government to sell concessions in order to support itself. A school system by which popular education may be given to all the people as it is given in the United States. If Diaz had done this, as he promised, he would have created an active public opinion in Mexico which would have made present conditions impossible.

"Along with the primary schools should go agricultural schools in which modern methods of agriculture should be taught. The army might well be used as a sanitation corps so as to insure against the recurrence of those plagues which so effect trade relations with Mexico and the health of her people. With these things Mexico would be well started on her way toward that better era which her more intelligent revolutionists thought she had reached in the early days of the Diaz administration, some forty years ago.

Unjust Land System.

"Every one in Mexico is united upon the proposition that the present land system is based upon privilege and is unjust. I have talked with twenty of the wealthiest and most intelligent men who belonged to the Diaz regime. All have admitted the fact. Some have even volunteered the statement that Mexico is in a feudal state, and that the land belongs to great proprietors, who work the peons and keep them in a semi-slave condition. If the facts were better realized, the people of the United States would not stand for the labor conditions that exist in Mexico, and for the peonage, which is only a form of slavery. I have some personal knowledge of these conditions.

"One morning, ten years ago, I was on a coffee finca—a great estate high up in the Sierra Madre—and I asked a peasant who labored from sunrise to sunset what he was getting for his day's work. His answer was 50 cents in Guatemalan money, which was equal to 25 cents gold. Here was a strong, able-bodied agricultural laborer earning $2 a month. I asked him why he did not go down to the railroad, where the American contractors would pay him 75 cents or more a day. His answer was: 'I would not be from here one mile before Don Porfirio would have reached out his hand and drawn me back to jail.' I said, 'Why could he arrest you?' and the answer given me falteringly and in fear was, 'Because I owe the store.'

He had lived and worked on that finca for twelve years, and, alive or dead, he is there today unless he has run away to join an army in the revolution. I asked that Mexican peon where he had come from, and he pointed across the mountains to a valley where his people had lived for a thousand years. 'Why did you leave there?' I inquired. His answer was that Don Porfirio had given the land where he was born to a Chinaman.

"From an investigation I made myself I found out that this was literally true, that the land, which was the hereditary possession of these Indians, had been taken from them by the government and given to a greater 'company' on terms which one can only guess, that the 'company' had sold the land to a syndicate, in which there were no Americans, upon condition that it should be populated under a law somewhat similar to our homestead law, with the reservation that it was neither to go to Mexican natives nor to citizens of the United States, and the immigrants with which the syndicate was populating that part of Mexico were Chinamen.

"I crossed a bridge on the Camino Real. The last time I crossed that bridge," said the peon who was with me, "the governor of the state was lying there dead. He had become ambitious and presented to the people a programme of reform. Doubtless he hoped to be another Juarez and Don Porfirio had ended his ambitions." The peon of Mexico—and out of possibly fifteen million inhabitants at least twelve millions are peons—is a kindly and gentle creature under normal conditions, disregardful of his own life, but not anxious to make war on any one. The peon has it forced upon his mind that he belongs to a definite sphere of life, and so he is without ambition and without foresight, but he is not without intelligence, and he makes an excellent workman when taught. All he needs is a chance to live and a chance to learn, land to cultivate and schools to go to. Is it conceivable that to add to the miseries of these struggling people any American citizen would want to make war on them?

American in Mexico

"We of the United States have the impulse that all virile epeople have. We feel conscious of our ability to do a job in nation-making much better than any one else. Read over Kipling's poem, 'The White Man's Burden.' It was not so much the white man's duty to clean up unsanitary conditions on the outskirts of civilization and to develop the backward peoples of the earth that he was expressing as it was our perfect, self-complacent appreciation of our supreme ability to do the cleaning up better than any other people on the face of the globe.

"There is a good deal of the special policeman, of the sanitary engineer, of the social worker and of the welfare dictator about the American people. We are quite conscious that in the development of this great country of ours in our march across the continent we have done a perfectly good job, and the pioneering spirit is very much alive. It is one of the most fundamental instincts that have made white men give to the world its history for the last thousand years.

"As a great nation, dedicated to democracy, we can not undertake a war of conquest against a people because their moral development has been neglected by their former rulers. We can, however, insist, and we must insist, that the people shall make sure our borders and give protection to the lives and property of our nationals who have settled in Mexico at her invitation.

"But is there no way, Mr. Secretary, in which the United States can help Mexico on the road to progress?" I asked. Mr. Lane said:

"To directly offer help to Mexico would be looked upon by them as an insult, like slapping them in the face. This is a kind of pride that is purely Latin. It is an inheritance that comes to Mexico by way of Spain along with the ideals that Cervantes ridicules in 'Don Quixote,' but it is so real a thing that no progress can be made without recognizing it. So I say that to tell Mexico what she shall do in our straight-out American fashion, to say to Mexico we are going to help you without being invited to do so, is equivalent under present conditions to a declaration of war.

Doubt Our Altruism.

"The Mexicans do not believe in our professions of altruism. We must say to Mexico one of two things: Either you must keep our border safe and protect the rights of our nationals in Mexico, which you have not done, or we will invade your country and restore order ourselves; or we must say to Mexico we understand the effort you are making to give the people a chance for life, liberty and pursuit of happiness and we will gladly help you if you ask our help to accomplish this end.

"The last is the policy that the United States has been seeking to put into effect. The difficulty in doing this arises almost solely out of the difficulty we Americans have in persuading the peoples of Latin America that our intentions are really honest.

"Nor is this altogether to be wondered at. Latin America has known the American chiefly as a seeker after concessions, a land grabber and an exploiter. Even where the American has bought property, as many have who today hold perfectly legal title to the land, they are absentee landlords, and every just criticism that the Irishman has to make against the absentee English landlord can be made against the absentee American landlord in Mexico.

"He does not become a part of Mexico; he does not throw his lot with the Mexicans. He is willing to spend his money there and employ labor, but he has nothing in common with the people of the country. The Mexican feels that the American goes there only to get rich out of the land and labor of Mexico, that he comes to exploit, not to develop.

Policy of Force Inadequate.

Mr. Lane had risen. He was standing on the raised veranda of his camp overlooking the placid waters of Lake Champlain. "There are just two more things that I want to say," he continued.

"There has never been a time since the United States established the present Mexican border under the treaty of Guadaloupe Hidalgo when raids, small or great, have not taken place across that border, and sometimes Americans have been the raiders—we may as well acknowledge the fact. Furthermore there never has been a time since the United States was founded when Mexico itself was as a whole in the control of any one government. Even Diaz never had the Yaqui Indian country, never really controlled Sonora.

"A police force alone has been a failure in Mexico. A failure both as far as the Mexicans are concerned and in protecting American life and American property. American life and American property have both been repeatedly insulted and destroyed during every administration. The protection of our people there has always been a problem, and I believe always will be a problem. This hoard and any foreigner takes who goes into a country filled with people who would risk their lives for a horse or a saddle.

"Further, I say this: That looking at Mexico solely from the standpoint of allowing our miners, our engineers and our capitalists to develop that country for their own benefit, and only incidentally for the benefit of Mexico, a policy of force is all that Mexico needs. It is the only policy that has ever been tried upon the Mexican people, and it has proved a success for the exploitation of the country by outsiders. If, however, we looked at the Mexican question from the standpoint of the Mexicans, is the policy of force adequate to the problem? No one who has studied it will say so. The truth is this:

The Verdict of Mankind.

"Mexico will never be a nation in any real sense, nor will the Mexicans ever be a people of agricultural, commercial, industrial or political consequence until the individual Mexican has had an economic and an education chance. He must be tied to Mexico, and not to a landlord, by the ownership of a piece of land; he must be able to read and write so that he may know what the needs of civilization are. This policy is that which I characterized as a policy of hope and hopefulness. It is founded on doubt and despair. It refuses to recognize the Mexicans who can only be shot into keeping order.

"If we despair of these people, who is to be their friend? Are we Americans to see Mexico forever remain a land of a few rich and cultivated gentlemen, and twelve million half-starved, ill-clothed and illiterate peasants, men, women and children, kept in slavery and subjection and ignorance, a people into whose lives comes nothing that raises them above the beasts of the field?

"The people of the United States can not consent to such conditions. Is it not time to try another policy than that of force alone, which has failed so miserably and wrought such woe? Is President Wilson to be criticised because he believes that it is not idealistic, not outside the range of reasonable hope to think of America as the helpful friend of Mexico? Why may not Mexico be led to see that we are honest in our willingness to help and that we can do it?

"President Wilson has clearly seen the end that he desired from the first and he has worked toward it against an opposition that was cunning and intensive, persistent and powerful. If he succeeds in giving a new birth of freedom to Mexico, he need safely will receive the verdict of mankind."

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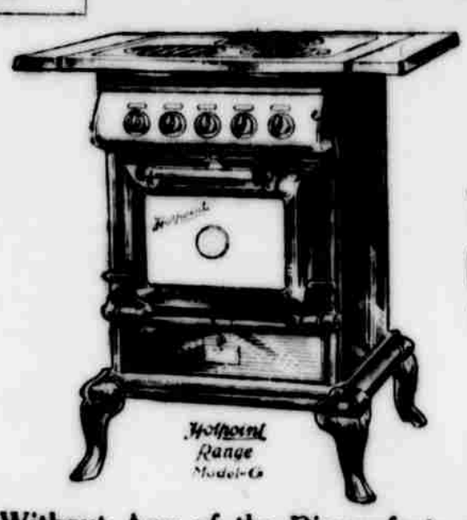

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