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**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The weeks that have elapsed since that fatal event of February 15th have been making history in a manner highly creditable to the American government and to our citizenship. Captain Sigsbee, the commander of the Maine, had promptly telegraphed his desire that judgment should be suspended until investigation had been made. The investigation was started at once, and 75 million Americans have accordingly suspended judgment in the face of a great provocation.

For it must be remembered that to suppose the destruction of the Maine an ordinary accident and not due to any external agency or hostile intent was, under all the circumstances, to set completely at defiance the law of probabilities. It is not true that battleships are in the habit of blowing themselves up. When all the enviroing facts were taken into consideration, it was just about as probable that the Maine had been blown up by some accident where no hostile motive was involved, as that the reported assassination of President Barrios of Guatemala, a few days previously, had really been a suicide. . . . It has been known perfectly well that Spanish hatred might at any time manifest itself by attempts upon the life of the American representative at Havana, Consul General Fitzhugh Lee.

This danger was felt especially at the time of the Havana riots in January, and it seems to have had something to do with the sending of the Maine to Havana Harbor. The Spaniards themselves, however, looked upon the sending of the Maine as a further aggravation of the long series of their just grievances against the United States. They regarded the presence of the Maine at Havana as a menace to Spanish sovereignty in the island and as an encouragement to the insurgents. A powerful American fleet lay at Key West

and the Dry Tortugas, with steam up ready to follow the Maine to the harbor of Havana at a few hours' notice. All this was intensely hateful to the Spaniards, and particularly to the Army officers at Havana who had sympathized with General Weyler's policy and who justly regarded General Weyler's recall to Spain as due to the demand of President McKinley.

The American pretense that the Maine was making a visit of courtesy seemed to these Spaniards a further example of Anglo-Saxon hypocrisy. That this intense bitterness against the presence of the Maine was felt among the military and official class in Havana was perfectly well known to Captain Sigsbee, his staff, and all his crew; and they were not unaware of the rumors and threats that means would be found to destroy the American ship. It was, furthermore, very generally supposed that the Spanish preparation for the defense of Havana had included mines and torpedoes in the harbor. At the time when the Maine went to Havana, it was a notorious fact that the relations between the Spain and the United States were so strained that that war was regarded as inevitable. If war had actually been declared while the Maine was at Havana, it is not likely that the Spanish would have permitted the ship's departure without an effort to do her harm. The Spanish harbor is now and it has been for a good while past under military control; and the American warship, believed by the Spanish authorities to be at Havana with only half-cloaked hostile designs, was obliged to accept the anchorage that was assigned by those very authorities.

In view of the strained situation and of the Spanish feeling that no magnanimity is due on Spain's part toward the United States, it is not in the least difficult to believe that the harbor authorities would have anchored the

Maine at a spot where, in case of the outbreak of war, the submarine harbor defenses might be effectively be used against so formidable an enemy. To understand the situation completely, it must not be forgotten that the Spanish government at first made objection against the Maine's intended visit to Havana and, in consenting, merely yielded to a necessity that was forced upon it. All Spaniards regarded the sending of the Maine to Havana as really a treacherous act on the part of the United States, and most of them would have deemed it merely a safe and precautionary measure to anchor her in the vicinity of a submarine mine. Doubtless these suggestions will be read by more than one person who will receive them with entire skepticism. But such readers will not have been familiar with what has been going on in the matter of the Cuban rebellion, or else they will be lacking in memories of good carrying power.

The great majority of the intelligent people of the United States could not, from the first, avoid perceiving that what we may call the self-destruction theory was extremely improbable; while what we may term the assassination theory was in keeping with all the circumstances. Nevertheless, although the probability of guilt was so overwhelming, the American people saw the fairness and the necessity of suspending judgment until proof had been substituted for mere probability. And there was in no part of the country any disposition to take snap judgment or to act precipitately. No other such spectacle of national forbearance has been witnessed in our times. Unquestionably, the whole community has been intensely eager for news; and it is perhaps true that certain newspapers, which have devoted themselves for a month or more to criticizing the sensational press, might as

well have been occupied in a more energetic effort to supply their readers with information. The fact is that the so-called war extras, which for many days were issued from certain newspaper offices at the rate of a dozen or more a day, have not seemed to communicate their hysteria to any considerable number of the American people, East or West, North or South, so far as our observation goes.

The situation has simply been one of a very absorbing and profound interest, while the suspense has been very trying to the nerves. The possibility that our country might soon be engaged in war with a foreign power has been a preoccupying thought not to be dismissed for a single hour. The whole country has known that a fateful investigation was in progress in Havana Harbor; that coast-defense work was being pushed all along our seaboard; that in all the shipyards, public and private, government work was being prosecuted with double or quadruple forces of men, working by night as well as by day; that ammunition factories, iron and steel plants, and every other establishment capable of furnishing any kind of military or naval supplies were receiving orders from the government and were working to the full extent of their capacity; that plans were being made for fitting out merchant ships as auxiliary cruisers; that our naval representatives were negotiating abroad for additional warships; that new regiments of artillerymen were being enlisted for the big guns on the seaboard; that naval recruits were being mustered in to man newly commissioned ships; that the railroads were preparing by order of the War Department to bring the little United States Army from western and northern posts to convenient southern centers; and that while we were making these preparations Spain on her part was trying

to raise money to buy ships and to secure allies. All these matters, and many others related to them, have within these past weeks made an immense opportunity for testing the news gathering resources of the American press. .

. When, therefore, on March 8, the House of Representatives unanimously voted to place \$50 million at the unqualified disposal of President McKinley as an emergency fund for the national defense - this action being followed by an equally unanimous vote of the Senate the next day - it was naturally taken for granted all over the country that the situation was believed by the President to be extremely critical. The continued delay of the Board of Inquiry - which had been oscillating between Havana and Key West, conducting its proceedings in secret and maintaining absolute reticence - had naturally served to confirm the belief that its report would show foul play; and it appeared that the President was basing his great preparations of war, in part at least, upon his advance knowledge of the evidence secured by the commission. The unanimity of Congress in support of the President created an excellent impression abroad. Fifty million is a very large sum to place in the hands of one man. It might have been supposed that there would have been members in both houses who would have insisted upon the appropriation of this money for specific purposes. That not a single man was found to make objection showed a very great capacity for united action in a time of emergency. It also showed, of course, how great is the confidence that Congress and the American people repose in the honor, wisdom, and public spirit of their Presidents.

At the time of the Venezuela incident, Congress in similar manner, came unanimously to the support of President Cleveland. In that case, however, there was not the remotest possibility of war; and the episode was merely a diplomatic one in which it was deemed important to show that our government could rely absolutely upon the whole support of the people. The South on all such recent occasions has been foremost in expressions of patriotism. The vote of \$50 million, although an extraordinary measure justified only by the imminent danger of war, was clearly an act that no peace-loving man could reasonably criticize; for preparation is often the means by which conflict is avoided.

A larger Navy was in any case greatly desirable for our country, with its long seaboard on the Atlantic and the Pacific and its vast commerce; while the better fortification of our principal ports was an urgent necessity. Since the preparations that have been made so hurriedly during the past few weeks have been of a defensive nature, and since they have been carried out upon lines which had been duly considered in advance, they will have permanent value, and there will have been involved a very small percentage of waste. If Congress had been wise enough in the past three or four years to lay down more warships in our own yards, it would not have been necessary to contribute millions to foreign shipbuilders.

No part of the \$50 million will be squandered by the administration; but it is to be regretted that this emergency fund had not been already expended during the five preceding years by more liberal appropriations for coast defense and naval construction. The great shipyards of the United States, both public and private, are now at the point where, with a sufficient amount

of regular work to do, they would speedily be able to compete on equal terms with the best shipbuilding plants of Europe. Iron and steel supplies are now much cheaper in the United States than anywhere else, and it is only the relatively small amount of shipbuilding that has been demanded by our government that has made it more expensive to build a war vessel here than else where.

In a time of real emergency, however, the resources of the United States would prove themselves great enough to supply our own people and the whole world besides. The quickness and inventiveness of American mechanics, engineers, and manufacturers have no parallel in Europe. On a year's notice the United States might undertake to cope evenhanded with either the Dual or the Triple Alliance - although we have now only the nucleus of an army and the beginning of a navy, while the European powers have made war preparation their principal business for a whole generation. It is to be suspected that one reason why the American people have bought the newspapers so eagerly during the past weeks is to be found in the satisfaction they have taken in learning how a strictly peaceful nation like ours could if necessary reverse the process of beating swords into plowshares. It is true, for example, that we have built only a few torpedo boats and only a few vessels of the type known as destroyers; but we have discovered that about a hundred very rich Americans had been amusing themselves within the past few years by building or buying splendid oceangoing, steel-built steam yachts of high speed and staunch qualities, capable of being quickly transformed into naval dispatch boats or armored and fitted with torpedo tubes.

Probably not a single private Spanish citizen could turn over to his government such a vessel as the magnificent Goelet yacht, the Mayflower, which was secured by our Navy Department on March 16; not to mention scores of other private steam yachts of great size and strength that wealthy American citizens are ready to offer if needed. It is the prevailing opinion nowadays, it is true, that nothing is to be relied upon in naval war but huge battleships, which take from two to three or four years to build. But if a great war were forced upon us suddenly, it is altogether probable that American ingenuity would devise something wholly new in the way of a marine engine of war, just as American ingenuity improvised the first modern ironclads. We have already in our Navy a dynamite cruiser, the Vesuvius, which in actual warfare might prove more dangerous than a half dozen of the greatest battleships of the European navies. There has just been completed, moreover, and offered to our government, a submarine boat, the Holland, which seems to be capable of moving rapidly for several miles so completely submerged as to offer no target for an enemy; and it may well be that the torpedoes discharged from an insignificant little vessel capable of swimming below the surface like a fish might prove as fatal to the battleships of an enemy as the alleged mine in the harbor of Havana was fatal to our battleship the Maine. Nowadays, warfare is largely a matter of science and invention; and since a country where the arts of peace flourish and prosper is most favorable to the general advance of science and invention, we stumble upon the paradox that the successful pursuit of peace is after all the best preparation for war.

Another way to put it is to say that modern warfare has become a matter of machinery, and that the most highly developed mechanical and industrial nation will by virtue of such development be most formidable in war. This is a situation that the Spaniards in general are evidently quite unable to comprehend. Their ideas are altogether medieval.

They believe themselves to be a highly chivalrous and militant people, and that the people of the United States are really in great terror of Spanish prowess. They think that Spain could make as easy work of invading the United States as Japan made of invading China. Their point of view is altogether theatrical and unrelated to modern facts. A country like ours, capable of supplying the whole world with electrical motors, mining machinery, locomotive engines, steel rails, and the structural material for modern steel bridges and "skyscrapers," not to mention bicycles and sewing machines, is equally capable of building, arming, and operating an unlimited number of ships of every type, and of employing every conceivable mechanical device for purposes of national defense. In the long run, therefore, even if our preliminary preparations had been of the scantiest character, we should be able to give a good account of ourselves in warfare.

. . . Quite regardless of the responsibilities for the Maine incident, it is apparently true that the great majority of the American people are hoping that President McKinley will promptly utilize the occasion to secure the complete pacification and independence of Cuba. There are a few people in the United States - we should not like to believe that more than 100 could be found out of a population of 75 million - who believe that the United States ought to join hands with Spain in forcing the Cuban insurgents to lay down

their arms and to accept Spanish sovereignty as a permanent condition under the promise of practical home rule.

It needs no argument, of course, to convince the American people that such a proposal reaches the lowest depths of infamy. It is much worse than the proposition made by a few people in Europe last year that the victorious Turks should have the countenance and support of the great nations of Europe in making Greece a part of the Turkish empire. For the Turks had fairly conquered the Greeks; and if Europe had kept hands off, Greece would have been reduced very quickly to the position of an Ottoman province. But in Cuba it is otherwise. The insurgents, with no outside help, have held their own for more than three years, and Spain is unable to conquer them.

The people of the United States do not intend to help Spain hold Cuba. On the contrary, they are now ready, in one way or in another, to help the Cubans drive Spain out of the Western Hemisphere. If the occasion goes past and we allow this Cuban struggle to run on indefinitely, the American people will have lost several degrees of self-respect and will certainly not have gained anything in the opinion of mankind.