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War With Japan

What Shall the U. S. Get Out of It?

NO, the substance of the U. S. controversy with Japan is not immigration. It is not a genuine conviction that Japan is planning an aggressive war on the United States. It is China—trade and profits. There are of course minor elements. There are war-scare mongers who make profits out of congressional appropriations for munitions and armor plate. There are capitalists, land speculators, and merchants on the Western coast who honestly think that they did not get their fair share of the profits of the last war or that they do not now receive their due proportion out of the annual pork barrel for harbor improvements and coast defenses. There are labor-politicians in some communities who flourish on anti-Japanese agitation. There are restless navy officers who enjoy fishing in troubled waters and are eager to see the "untoward incident" precipitated—on account of the fun, the glory, the excitement, the honors, the decorations, and the promotions. Some of them are doubtless wondering just how the matter can be started with a show of propriety. There are also some brave souls who still think that another world conflict would strengthen national and Christian virtues—the two being one and the same thing. All these, however, could be easily held in check by a President and a State Department really bent on peace with honor.

But the substance of the controversy with Japan is not immigration, nor fear of Japanese aggression, nor the promotion of Christian virtues with bayonets, bombs, and gases; it is China—trade and profits. This has been the substance of the matter for many long years. We know from Russian diplomatic papers now exposed to public gaze that Philander Knox, when Secretary of State, carried his system of dollar diplomacy into the Far East. Manchuria, Mongolia, the Chinese Eastern Railway, and other spheres of economic gain were the objects of his tender solicitude. It was the Washington specter that facilitated the secret union of Russia and Japan just before the collapse of the Czar's regime. Professor Paul Reinsch, in his reminiscences of a diplomat, frankly continued the serial story. He regarded the American legation in Peking as a bureau for the assistance of American merchants and capitalists in China, and he did his best to get the United States committed to a programme of driving Japan from the mainland by force of arms if necessary. This same trade and profit motive was at the centre of the savage assault on Japan during the dispute over Shantung. High and mighty gentlemen at Washington, who spoke softly about what England, France, and Italy got in the grand distribution of the spoils of victory at Versailles in 1919, were terribly shocked to learn that Japan got a bit of plunder also. American liberals were likewise horribly shocked and got quite red in the face lashing the

distant imperialists. What a strange collection of upstanding citizens joined in the clamor over Shantung—a clamor that almost landed us in a war with Japan over the business! Hard-boiled Tories who rejoiced in trampling on the liberties of the Filipinos, the Haitians, the Dominicans, the Nicaraguans, and the other wards of American marines, were visibly pained to see Japan holding a piece of territory belonging to the poor, dear Chinese. The cause was righteous—to those who could see the mote and not the beam.

We were headed for the crisis when Senator Borah forced the calling of the Washington Conference in which Hughes and Harding shone so brilliantly. By firm but gentle pressure England and the United States forced Japan to relax her grip on Shantung—without letting loose of anything themselves. Everything was done with great ceremony and with a fine feeling for the proprieties—and with less noise than would have followed an attempt of Germany and Japan to break the hold of American capitalists on the Philippines. About the same time the Chinese bubble burst. Even the man in the street discovered that the government of Peking was no government at all and had no power outside the walls of the city—and very little inside. It stood revealed as a band of military adventurers recognized by the foreign Powers and sustained by the leavings from the salt and customs duties collected under alien auspices—saving always "the sovereignty and sacred honor of China." American bankers who lent money to the Chinese government without security lost their investments. Japanese imperialists were badly singed. American capitalists who rushed in to gather the prizes promised by the bustling, bustling Department of Commerce got their fingers burned also. In spite of all the puffing and blowing, American business with the sixty million Japanese continued to be about twice the business with the three or four hundred million Chinese. The vocation of loving China and hating Japan lost some of its charm.

For a time, American financiers, having suffered a set-back in China, turned their attention to Nippon. Some of the most astute said unto themselves: "Lend money to the Japanese and let them do it in and to China." So money was lent to the Oriental Development Company which operates in Korea, China, and other distant places—sometimes curiously and mysteriously. A big loan was advanced to the Industrial Bank of Japan, which likewise finances various economic activities in the Far East. Another loan, huge in amount, was made to the Imperial Japanese Government on a basis that netted a tidy commission as well as a good rate of interest. Another was made to the Great Electric Company, and still others to minor concerns. All these loans work for peace between Japan and the United States—at least for the present. American financiers do not want the business structure of the Far East shaken by dangerous military adventures.

But the saturation-point is about reached in Japan, and longing eyes still rove restlessly in the direction of Manchuria, Mongolia, Siberia, the China trade, and the waste places of the Far East. If American financiers are content to lend money to the Japanese, American promoters and traffic hunters are thinking of other worlds to conquer.

So "what" we shall get in the great day is fairly

clear—at least in the scheme of calculation. Assuming victory as a matter of course, the United States at the close would take Formosa and the neighboring isles, the South Manchurian Railway, and other valuable properties. It would assume "moral responsibility" for Korea, Manchuria, and Mongolia. Doubtless a "commission" of experts and bishops would show that Christian ethics did not require us to follow the example of Japan in the case of Shantung and return Manchuria to China. The outposts of American civilization would be planted along the Chinese Eastern Railway and the basis laid for the penetration of Siberia. Korea would be assimilated to the benevolent administration of the Philippines. The United States would master the trade of China if it took seven times twenty-one demands. This is the substance of the "what."

Of course there would be other things. There would be "cost plus" once more, labor boards, and committees on public information. There would be created a few thousand additional millionaires. The Hon. Charles E. Hughes has soberly said that in view of the precedents already set, constitutional government as we now know it would hardly survive a long war even if victoriously waged. So there would be sedition and espionage acts. Professors would be expelled for expressing doubts about the infallibility of Congress and the President. The jails would be filled with American citizens unable to believe what their consciences forbid. Aliens would be deported by the ship load. The Department of Justice would let loose a million spies to stir up suspicion and hatred.

And who are "we"? According to Mr. Dwight Morrow's analysis of foreign bond distribution in the United States, the number of "us" interested in spreading the benefits of civilization is very large. The advent of the baby bond has multiplied our godly company. There are some of us on every Main Street. Stock-sharing schemes augment the fraternity of the fortunate. As most of the men drafted for the army and the navy would be farmers and unskilled laborers not useful for the lathe or test tube, a great proportion of "us" would escape the heat of the day. Especially is this true since many thousand Negro boys could be called upon to help carry the white man's burden and hold back the rising tide of color. In the end there would be jobs for deserving Republicans and Democrats in the new dependencies, places for teachers and missionaries. On the whole quite a number of "us" will be delighted with "what" "we" shall get.

But things might not be so simple, eventually if not now. Would England stand idly by and see the United States become mistress of the Pacific and dominant in China? Would Russia always remain powerless under the sway of American enterprise? Would it be possible to isolate the burning house? What if the conflagration started on the Yangtze or on the Inland Sea spread to Europe? It is easier to start a war than to stop it or to divine its outcome. Would the spoils and the fun then balance the blood, treasure, frenzy, and hysteria? Who would hold the bonds, gather the profits, reap the dividends? Who would give their lives and pay the taxes? Would the loot be worth the pain? For a little while the sun shines and it is constitutionally permissible to ask these questions.—The Nation, (N. Y.)