

¶The will to conquer in the Japanese.

## DON'T UNDERESTIMATE JAPAN

WILL Japan break down from war-weariness? I think, if a plebiscite could be held on the simple issue of war or peace, the majority of the Japanese would vote for peace. This would most probably be true of any country at war. If one talks privately with Japanese who have sons or husbands or brothers at the front, one finds that they are like human beings in any other country, more concerned about the safety of their loved ones than about the high-sounding phrases which they read in newspapers and hear in radio broadcasts. But between this mood and one of revolt or mutiny there is a wide gulf. The Japanese people are in the grip of a powerful, well-oiled military machine which shows no signs of cracking. Psychologically it is almost impossible for a Japanese to be a conscientious objector, if only because of the disgrace which this would bring on his whole family. Quite conceivably his parents would feel obliged to commit suicide.

It is often suggested that China enjoys the great advantage, over Japan, of fighting in self-defense. This advantage, would probably be great if the

war were being fought by intellectuals on both sides, by the types of Japanese and Chinese, for instance, whom one meets at conferences of the Institute of Pacific Relations. But for the average peasant, shopkeeper, laborer, clerk, such factors as regularity of rations, care of the wounded, provision for families at home (which Japan can order better than China because of its greater material progress) bulk larger, as a general rule, than the abstract ethical issues of the war.

Moreover, Japan has built up an ideological case for its war which is not necessarily ineffective in influencing Japanese because it seems mythological to most Westerners. The main thesis of this case is that Japan is fighting to save China and, in the long run, other Asiatic countries as well, from the double threat of Soviet Communism and occidental colonial exploitation.

The statement that Japan's position in China is comparable with Napoleon's disastrous penetration to Moscow will, I think, be quickly disproved by the course of events. For the Japanese in China possess what Napoleon in Russia lacked: a

reliable network of rail and water routes of communication. The Chinese "scorched earth" policy has inflicted more distress on Chinese civilians than on Japanese troops. Even if the number of fugitives in the unoccupied parts of China runs into millions, the greater part of the dense population of the occupied regions must remain and somehow earn a living, accommodating themselves to the Japanese more or less as their ancestors made their adjustments with Mongol and Manchu conquerors in the past.

Can the Japanese be harassed out of China by means of guerrilla warfare? It is too soon to answer this question with absolute certainty. But the Japanese are confident, on the basis of their Manchurian experience, that this type of resistance can be reduced to negligible proportions within a few years. Manchoukuo today is unquestionably a going concern, from the Japanese point of view. Sporadic insurgent activity has not made the country economically untenable. Production and foreign trade have increased since 1931. The railways have been substantially extended. The currency system is orderly and taxes are regularly collected. If a few hundred Japanese soldiers are killed every year fighting the malcontents whom the Japanese call bandits

and the Chinese regard as nationalist patriots, this does not bulk very large in the eyes of Japan's military leaders. And the loss of thousands or even tens of thousands of lives during the next years in maintaining "law and order" in China will, in the same way, be considered a minor incident in the building up of a great Asiatic empire.

It may be, of course, that the Japanese underestimate the obstacles which confront them, that the Chinese guerrillas, supported and reenforced by regular nationalist forces, will make any kind of economic reconstruction more difficult in China than it has been in Manchoukuo. But at the present time there is no feeling of frustration in Japanese military circles as a result of the Chinese partisan warfare. Japanese civilians have been moving into occupied Chinese cities in considerable numbers, not only into Peiping, Tientsin and Shanghai, but also into towns like Taiyuanfu, capital of Shansi, and Shihchia-chung, on the Peking-Hankow Railway, both of which are close to regions of intensive guerilla activity. This movement would scarcely take place if there were any apprehension that the Japanese might be driven out of the places which they have occupied.

The weakest points in Ja-

pan's armor are its finances and the state of its international balance of payments. Japan has never been able to balance its budget since the occupation of Manchuria. Its national debt, which was about 6,000,000,000 *yen* in 1931, is now about 16,000,000,000 *yen* and will exceed 20,000,000,000 *yen* by 1940. War exigencies and depression in export trade have stripped Japan of almost all its gold, except for a sum of 500,000,000 *yen* which is held as a nominal currency reserve, although the currency is actually inconvertible. The trade balance with countries outside the *yen* bloc is unfavorable to the extent of about 500,000,000 *yen*.

One should not overlook these economic danger signals. But one should not overestimate their importance. Does any one really suppose that some day the Japanese Cabinet will meet and decide that, since the country is bankrupt, the war in China should be given up? That such a cabinet, in all probability, would be machine-gunned out of existence is only one of the reasons why no such action will be taken. History is full of examples of countries which fought for years against far greater odds than Japan faces today and in spite of much more serious economic difficulties. (The American South and

Germany in the World War are cases in point.)

If Japan is in financial straits, this is true, in greater or less degree, of every large power in the world. If the United States can afford to spend billions of dollars annually for an indefinite period of time to support it unemployed, it is at least conceivable that Japan can pour out billions of *yen*, treating the war in China and the economic development of Manchoukuo as a sort of gigantic WPA project. One of the incidental advantages of this arrangement is that it tends to find employment abroad for the restless spirits who might otherwise be killing Cabinet Ministers at home.

To the average Japanese in town and country, the war has brought hardships and deprivations but no suffering so acute as to represent a serious threat to working efficiency or national morale. University and technical school graduates can have jobs for the asking—a welcome change from the lean years of unemployment. Japan has its booming munitions centers, its Hog Islands and Bethlehems (the town of Yawata, in Kyushu, site of a large steel works, is a good example). Here some skilled workers earn salaries that are fabulous by oriental standards, as much as two or three hundred *yen* a month. As against this must be set bitter

distress in the small handicraft trades, which cannot adapt themselves to wartime production and cannot get their customary raw materials because of import restrictions.

The strongest point in Japan's war-time economy is self-sufficiency in food. Japan and its colonies and dependencies, with the adjacent seas, produce in abundance everything that the masses of the people eat: rice, fish, soya beans, fruits, vegetables, sugar. After a year and a half of war Japan is less pinched for food than Germany

(allowing for different national habits of diet).

And experience shows that acute food shortage is the only sure means, apart from decisive defeat on the battlefield, of breaking the morale and working capacity of the men and women behind the lines.

Don't underestimate Japan. Any policy framed on the assumption that Japan is near its last gasp, ready to crumble under slight pressure, is likely to prove foredoomed to disillusionment.—*William Henry Chamberlain, condensed from Asia.*

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### *Retorts in Two Syllables*

EVEN when he was Lieutenant-Governor of Massachusetts, Calvin Coolidge's habit of taciturnity was outstanding. Two women acquaintances were discussing the Coolidge trait of using no more words than absolutely necessary, and the upshot of it was a wager which one of the women explained to Coolidge the next time she met him:

"Mr. Lieutenant-Governor, a friend of yours and mine, Mrs. Smith, has wagered that I can't persuade you to say *three words* on the subject of equal rights for women. Three little words, mind you! Now what do you say to such a wager?"

Coolidge reflected a moment, then replied with twinkling eyes:

"You lose."—*Your Life.*