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THE NEXT WAR?

The Great Pacific War. By Hector C. Bywater.
Constable. 10s. 6d. net.

UP to a point the probable course of a naval war between the United States and Japan can be foreseen with some certainty. Within a few weeks from the outbreak of hostilities both Guam and the Philippines would inevitably fall into Japanese hands. What happens then? That is the riddle which evades solution.

Mr. Bywater does not find a real answer to this question in his 'History of the American-Japanese Campaign of 1931-33.' Combining exciting fiction with interesting facts concerning the topography of little known areas of the Pacific, the author intends his narrative to be considered seriously, but this is made difficult by a pro-American bias which demands the eventual defeat of Nippon. Having lost her outposts in the Western Pacific, America proceeds to build a huge dummy fleet whose movements completely deceive the keenest brains of the Japanese Admiralty. While the enemy is in a state of bewilderment and indecision, America captures first Truk and then the Pelew Islands. Thus Japan's outer ring of defence is pierced, and a strong base established behind the enemy's lines. The great problem is solved: America is within striking distance of Japanese territory. After describing the destruction of Japan's battle fleet, Mr. Bywater then brings his story to an end.

In the light of the author's previous volume we expected better strategic reasoning than this: something deeper than a mere series of fortuitous advances from atoll to atoll in the South Western archipelagos. It is easy, of course, to criticize, but we feel that Mr. Bywater has been led away by his certainty of America's eventual success and has therefore forced himself to assume that it must be accomplished by the direct clash of fleets. If that were the case the

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odds, if anything, are on the side of Japan. Her navy, despite the Washington Agreement, is far more powerful than the misleading tonnage ratio, 525,000-315,000, indicates. The magnificent traditions of her navy create a factor not to be lightly under-estimated when compared with a force which has yet to undergo the ordeal of sanguinary engagement. Furthermore, Japan would have the immense advantage of fighting from the interior of her semi-circular front. Lastly, the grave lack of personnel in the U.S. Navy is notorious, and sailors, unlike soldiers, cannot be trained in a few months. Having taken Manila and Guam, Japan would sue for a reasonable peace during the period of preparation, and the powers with interests in the Far East might be disposed to back up her proposals.

In the event of war America's greatest chance of success lies in a strict economic campaign. Whether such a dull road to victory would satisfy the American citizen's sense of the spectacular is another matter. Mr. Bywater does not leave many possibilities out of his book and the menace of 300,000 Japanese in the Hawaiian Islands is faithfully recorded. These, he relates, rise up in a revolt which is rapidly quelled, followed by the partial segregation of the rebels. Something of this sort is likely, and America might be constrained to transport agricultural labour if she desired her base to remain self-supporting. Among the various phases of the war, the author predicts an intense sea-plane activity, thus allowing plenty of scope for sensational incident. Whether the sea-plane will ever develop from a mere observer for the fleet into an arm of offence has yet to be proved. A sea-plane carrier would always be the subject of special attack, and once disabled all air manoeuvres would cease automatically.

Mr. Bywater has evidently taken an imminent amount of trouble with his subject and he might have produced a valuable treatise on Pacific strategy. Unfortunately he has merely written a highly entertaining account of an imaginary conflict between two interesting opponents.