

REVIEWS

BOOKS

The Fight for the Pacific, by Mark J. Gayn.
(New York, John Day 1941, 370 pp.)

Our Future in Asia, by Robert Aura Smith.
(New York, Viking Press, 1940, 306pp., US \$4.00.)

History in the Pacific is in the making. We have picked two recent publications by reputed American journalists which have been instrumental in forming public opinion in the United States toward Pacific affairs.

Mark J. Gayn, author of *The Fight for the Pacific*, was born in Outer Mongolia of American parents. Having spent all his life in the Orient, he has been special correspondent in China for the *Washington Post* since 1934. His book is frankly anti-Japanese. Colored by a political terminology of typical American stamp, it is the work of a keen journalist with an eye for the spectacular. When it was written, many diplomatic maneuvers of the Great Powers in relation to the Pacific were shrouded in secrecy. They offered full scope for more or less convincing conjectures. The author, of course, presents the American version, pieced together from documents, utterances of important personalities, actual events, and rumors.

He centers his attention upon Japan. The greater part of his book is devoted to her policies and leaders. Most of her moves come in for a generous amount of reprobation. They are explained by "lust for power," which, to any but the casual observer, would appear rather too facile and superficial a motive. The policies of the other Pacific powers are described almost exclusively in their connection with Japan. The intricate strata of Russian, American, British, and Chinese interests are relegated to the background and touched only in passing.

Yet we think the book makes good reading. It offers plenty of information and strives to be matter-of-fact. His contact with numerous actors on the Asiatic political and military stage permits the author to sketch both the outstanding and the minor characters. These sketches contribute greatly towards enlivening the story. His views on Japan's strength form the most interesting part of the book. Unlike some of his more boastful countrymen, he does not minimize the fighting power of either her army or navy, nor does he delude himself over her determination to pursue the course she has charted.

The author also sheds light upon American endeavors to complete the encirclement of Japan by arraying Russia in the democratic front, and, simultaneously, to keep China fighting by the grant of political loans and the shipment of war materials. He refrains from waxing sentimental over the reasons which cause the United States to impede Japanese expansion. He makes no bones about the fact that they are far from unselfish, and that they aim at regaining the preponderant position in the Pacific which America enjoyed after the Washington Conference in 1921.

A few chapters deal with Russian influence in Outer Mongolia and Sinkiang. They seem rather to underrate the domination exercised by Moscow in Outer Mongolia, which in the twenties was thoroughly bolshevized and which is now part of the Soviet Union in everything but name. In general the book makes light of Russian designs in the East. The strength of the Red Army, though deemed considerable by the author, is greatly underestimated in regard to mechanized equipment at its disposal, as events of the past six months have proved.

The author's views on the Philippines deserve special mention, as do his lines on American preparations for war in the Pacific.

Our Future in Asia, by Robert Aura Smith, is a book as straightforward and candid as it is informative. The author, an active and influential newspaperman, has spent many years in the Orient. He knows the Far East, and the Philippines in particular.

His book deals with the countries that lie within the circle of the South China Sea, i.e. South China, French Indo-China, Thailand, Malaya, the Netherlands East Indies, and the Philippines. He presents facts, his narrative is graphic and lucid, and his argumentation realistic. He eschews concealing material aims behind a screen of hypocritical moral preaching, which nowadays seems to have become the nauseous habit of a goodly number of writers. Indeed, the author takes great pains to emphasize the economic and strategic stakes of the democratic front, discounting the moral issues and clearly outlining the conflict of interest between the two camps which has now led to war in the Pacific. He does not fail to sketch the Japanese point of view. While he enunciates a distinctly American thesis, as opposed to Nipponese contentions, he admits, at least by implication, Japan's right of

thinking and acting in conformity with her needs.

The author is apparently a convinced advocate of liberal capitalism, an economic system that, in the Far East, has benefited the *beati possidentes*, i.e. the United States, Great Britain, France, and the Netherlands. He pleads for preservation of this system and proposes defense of the Asiatic colonial possessions against Japan. Ironically enough the very reasons which he adduces would seem to justify Japanese "aggression," unless one takes the legalistic attitude which all "haves" are inclined to profess towards the "have-nots," be they individuals or nations. The book shows, if only by recounting the differing standpoints, that the present war is not fought for ideological niceties such as Democracy, Dictatorship, and other equally vague notions whose definitions oscillate for the convenience of propagandists, but for the conception of life itself.

The five major tropical imports of the United States are rubber, sugar, coffee, vegetable oil, and tin, all of which are produced in the South China Sea region. Dealing first with the most important commodity, rubber, he proves the present dependence upon shipments from Asia. Although he admits that the center of production could be shifted to South America and that rubber substitutes might be made in the United States, he deprecates both possibilities since they would necessitate new capital outlay, large-scale organization, and a great deal of time. In regard to sugar, the argument for retention of the Asiatic foothold is even more threadbare, inasmuch as Cuban sugar production is capable of expansion without any difficulty whatever. However, the author opines that sugar production in the Philippines should be subject to American control lest the market be glutted. Domestic producers are to be assured of their profit. Mr. Smith concedes also that beet-sugar production within United States boundaries might be increased, but he terms it uneconomical and scorns it as the type of back-breaking labor that Americans refuse to do. As to coffee, any amount would be available in South America, but he fears that the Netherlands East Indies might not have the tender regard for American profits and limit production once they have cut their ties with the democratic camp. American supplies of vegetable oils are ample, which, however, fails to satisfy the author, who considers them unfit substitutes for the better coconut oil. Since the exploitation of Bolivian tin mines is dependent upon the co-operation of the local government, he deduces an overwhelming interest in control over Malayan and Netherlands East Indian production. The book also stresses that the present political status of the United States is a very important chip in the economic poker game.

Such are the extraordinary reasons which are supposed to fortify American public opinion against making concessions to the most advanced Asiatic country, a country which is overpopulated, deficient of virtually all raw materials, and economically dependent on more affluent neighboring territories. The United States wishes to retain a dominating position in the East, not because she would be vitally affected by its loss, but because she desires to perpetuate economic privileges coupled with a secure profit and with the advantageous possibility of exerting political and economic pressure. She wants to maintain her standard of living, work must be sufficiently easy, and, naturally enough, she dislikes being dependent upon the co-operation of other states. In the same breath the author states that all that America insists upon is the "open door" and freedom of trade. It seems to escape him that American desires deny that freedom of trade to the Japanese. Indeed, the economic war of the Anglo-Saxon powers during the past few months was designed to deprive the Island Empire of its very right of existence. Japan is absolutely dependent upon the resources of Asia. If she is shut out by states which, at best, have a secondary interest in that part of the world, is she supposed to content herself with that fact?

Mr. Smith brings up the old argument that the colonial peoples in Asia prefer domination by the democracies to close co-operation with Japan. Democratic rule is supposed to be more benevolent. Yet the author makes it clear that, with the possible exception of Malaya, there have always been unrest and dissatisfaction amongst the native populations at one time or another. He explodes the theory that the United States was prepared to relinquish the Philippines for the benefit of the Filipinos. He ascribes the drive in Congress for independence of the islands to vested interests in the Union which were anxious to keep out foreign competition.

Maintenance of the standard of living is a favorite theme song on the American side of the Pacific. Yet it is very doubtful whether elimination of democratic control over East Asia would lower that standard of living. It should not be overlooked that Japan has been the most important trading partner of the United States in Asia. There is no reason to believe that Japan would put a stop to the intercourse between the various Asiatic countries and America. America would, of course, have to negotiate where she has been dictating. But with the tremendous resources at the disposal of the United States, she would always enjoy a good bargaining position.

It is sad to learn from Mr. Smith how trifling were the motives which drove the democracies towards their intransigent attitude resulting in the catastrophe of the present war in the Pacific.—K. F.