

oceanic outpost nearest South America, 2,000 miles west of the Chilean coast. Britain had taken over Fiji and the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, and had established protectorates over south-east New Guinea, the southern Solomons, and the little kingdom of Tonga, and shared with France the rule of the New Hebrides. New Zealand had acquired the Cook Group and Niue.

With the end of the last war Germany disappeared from the South Pacific, and Japan came on the scene with her occupation of the German Micronesian islands—the Carolines, Marshall, and Mariana groups, in the midst of which there remained tucked away the United States outpost of Guam. Australia occupied New Guinea and Nauru, and New Zealand took over German Samoa. Throughout the period of the last war changes continued to be made not so much in ownership as in administration. For instance, in 1916 the Gilbert and Ellice Group became part of the British Dominions. These changes continued right up until almost the outbreak of this war; Ocean, Fanning, and Washington Islands, for example, came under New Zealand in 1926.

Through the years of this century modern methods of transport have gradually brought to these islands a greater importance. Their harbours, used in the early days by the sailing-ships in the China trade, were by 1900 vital as coaling stations to the growing steamer fleets passing through their waters. To that value the advance of aviation was in the next forty years to add greatly; air strips were to become as valuable as harbours. This led to other changes. The Phoenix Group, previously uninhabited, became suddenly important through its position on the Fiji-Honolulu air-mail line, and was brought into the Gilbert and Ellice Island Colony by Order in Council in March, 1937. In 1938 American officials were placed on Canton and Enderbury islands to sustain America's claim that she had as much right there as Britain. The argument was settled amicably in 1939, when Canton Island was placed under Anglo-

American condominium and became an important station on the Pan-American Airways' southern route.

In trade the value of the islands was substantial, but in the aggregate volume of world trade was scarcely important—even by 1938. The whole trade, export and import, of all the islands in that year was hardly three-quarters of that of New Zealand—£57,000,000 against £80,000,000, and of that £57,000,000 no less than £41,000,000 belonged to Hawaii, leaving only £16,000,000 for all the rest.

Above all this was the strategic value of the islands as bases for naval and air forces. For Britain and France they were links in the chain of empire, and for the nations bordering the Pacific—Japan, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand—they were, in fact, outer zones of defence.

In this respect the Japanese mandates had a value out of all proportion to their size. The six hundred islands of the Caroline, Mariana, and Marshall groups stretch over 2,700 miles from east to west and 1,300 miles north from the Equator, and their 830 square miles of land area contain several large harbours and a number of excellent airfields. Under the terms of the mandate granted to her after the last war Japan was forbidden to fortify these islands, and at the Washington Conference of 1921-22 she agreed with Britain and the United States not to strengthen or extend fortifications in other Pacific Island territories. Japan did not observe the terms of her mandate or abide by the Washington agreement. "For commercial reasons," as at Saipan, she began the construction and improvement of harbours and the development of airfields, the building of dry docks and submarine bases, and other works, which by the early 1930's had already provided her with the bases she used for her southward offensive in 1941.

This was the last step in Japan's creeping advance before her final thrust, a move remote from her larger operations on the Asiatic mainland, but an essential part of her whole attempt to seize world domination, an attempt which she is not to be allowed to repeat.