

"Britain in the Pacific" - 1st Prize
"Past, Present, and Future." Class A.

V.G.

2nd Prize
Class A

1930

Curry, C.H.:
British Colonial
Policy J.

The conditions of the Old and New Colonial Empires of Britain present a wide contrast. The American continent was exploited with commerce in an age before the Economic Adjustment (commonly known as the Industrial Revolution); its peoples offered no serious resistance to European invaders. The Pacific is being opened up by industry in an age of industrialism; there the white man was opposed by the closed empires of Japan and China. Therefore, it is to be expected that the Pacific presents the same problems with greater opposition than in the New World; moreover, the nations of Japan and America have now entered the conflict. With her acquisition of Pacific territory, Britain is indeed "The Empire of the Eternal Sun," but she will have to combat these dangers in the Pacific, if she is to retain her title. And "the international friends of today are the enemies of tomorrow." If an Asiatic power and a European nation declared war on the Empire simultaneously, what would be the fate of its Pacific possessions? Obviously, then, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand have interests of increasing magnitude in the Pacific.

Although John Coorham holds the distinction of being the first Englishman to gaze upon the Pacific Ocean as early as 1575, although Drake traversed it in his circumnavigation, and in spite of the voyages of the East Indiamen, Britain knew little of this part of the world until the eighteenth century. The subsequent chapters in the history of the Pacific were regulated by the policies of the European powers: Portugal's possessions shrank to mere footholds like Macao; Spain lost all her influence, whilst the Dutch retained much of the East Indies. Thus it was that it was Britain who won supremacy in the Pacific, for France entered the region hesitatingly, gaining little, Germany likewise won little and lost all at Versailles, Russia failed to maintain her hold upon distant Alaska whilst the advance of the United States and Japan was particularly belated. Though India was Britain's chief prize, her power has been felt in every part of the Pacific and Far East.

Fortunately for Britain, the early Portuguese and Spanish explorers had evidently missed their "Australia Terra," while the Dutch lighted upon the swampy north and west coasts of Australia. Yet it was not until 1770 that Captain Cook discovered New Zealand and the hostile

east coast of Australia. Indeed, until long after their discovery, Britain's findings in the Pacific were counted as of no value, the maze of outer archipelagos being regarded simply as stations for supplying water to the mariner. However, after England's loss of Georgia, Australia began to be used as a convict station. Legitimate settlement followed, so, by degrees, the whole continent was unveiled with typical British perseverance, and the finding of gold led to the much-needed increase in population. The confederation of the states in 1901 strengthened Britain's establishment in the Pacific.

Although Cook had discovered the Antipodes as early as 1770, serious interest in these islands did not begin until nearly three-quarters of a century later, when the cession ceded sovereignty and land to the Crown. Since then New Zealand has progressed very favourably under British control.

Similarly, Fiji, though discovered in 1643 by Tasman, did not become ours until the nineteenth century. In New Guinea we were less fortunate, since we secured only the island's south-east. Thus, by the middle of the last century, Britain had obtained a firm hold upon the Pacific Realm.

The Great War wrought considerable changes: Australia was charged with the administration of the German territories on her threshold, namely Kaiser Wilhelm's Land, the Bismarck and Solomon Islands; German Samoa was assigned to New Zealand. The remainder of German Micronesia, except Chuuk, went to Japan. Yet in spite of this territorial aggrandisement of the British Empire, a number of new problems have arisen out of it.

As much for the past. Not only politically but geographically the Pacific islands are of considerable value by virtue of their position, for they have long ceased to be considered as suitable for water supplies alone. Nowadays, the islands situated near the main steamship routes are of particular importance as coaling and cable stations, and therefore as "links of Empire," whose very unity rests upon them. Islets have also gained in importance with modern seaplane and submarine warfare, for which atolls form ideal retreats. Britain is fortunate in possessing many such islands in the Pacific.

The Pacific is, further, of great commercial value. When it is realised how large a part tropical products play in modern life, it is natural that Great Britain should make it her policy to obtain as big a share as possible in the trade resources of the Pacific. Thus, by

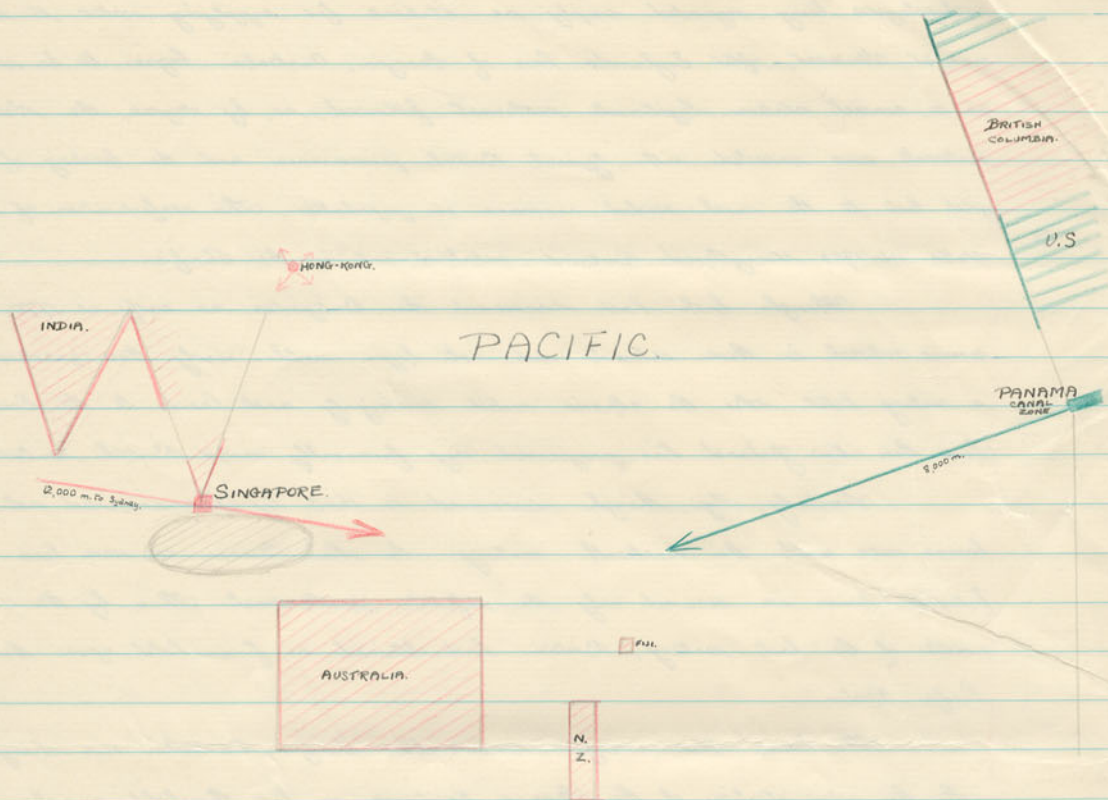


DIAGRAM SHOWING IMPORTANCE OF SINGAPORE
AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PANAMA

reason of her control of Singapore and Hong Kong, she has made London one of the chief world markets for rubber, tea, and spices, because, with her huge wardebt, trade control is of vital importance to the Empire. There again the War resulted in several material gains: Papua has petroleum, gold, and valuable coast-fisheries; Nauru possesses rich phosphate deposits. With these assets of strategic and political advantages, besides increased coaling and cable facilities of direct benefit to the Empire's organisation.

climax
phrase

Great Britain has been able to maintain her trade advantages in the Orient because she has her own ports there. Moreover, for the Empire, founded as it is upon sea-connections, good harbours are all important. And the ports of the Pacific include some of its finest. Of these, one of the most important is Singapore, the key of the western gateway of the Pacific. Commercially it occupies an unrivalled position; strategically, "it is to Asia what Key West is to the United States." Amongst our Far Eastern outposts, by far the greatest is Hong Kong, whose possession of a magnificent harbour and enjoyment of the privileges of a free-port under British rule have made it one of the principal ports of the world. In Chinese waters also, the naval station of Wei-hai-wei guards Peking and the Chinese Eastern Railway. Of extreme value to Britain's sphere of influence in this region are the Chinese Treaty Ports, where, with concessions at such places as Shanghai, Canton, and Tientsin, the Empire holds a significant grip upon Chinese trade on the Pacific. On the Pacific coast of Australia, Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne are of great importance, for trade and defence alike, as are Auckland and Wellington in New Zealand, and Lima and Yaguajay in mid-Pacific, on the main transoceanic routes. Furthermore, Britain's possession of a long stretch of Pacific coastline in British Columbia, with the splendid harbour of Vancouver, is essential to the Empire, since it links up her Pacific possessions with the Homeland. Thus is the British Empire apparently secure strategically and commercially in the Pacific.

[Barnham, I:
The New World]

now return
to China

If these seaports would be of little use were they not linked together. Modern science has materially assisted the growth of an Imperial spirit by facilitating greater intercourse between the component parts of the Empire. All are interconnected by frequent steamship services, whilst the trans-Pacific chain of coaling-stations has proved itself no less useful in peace than in war, in assisting the operation of the shipping lines that carry Britain's commerce across the seas. An "all-Red" submarine

cable from Canada to Australasia, together with a number of "wireless" installations completes Britain's communications in the Pacific. This is space annihilation. And the day is not far distant when there will be an all-British flying-boat service across the ocean, further to strengthen the bonds which bind together the most widely-flung Empire the world has ever known.

Not only are these ports of great defensive importance, but are of tremendous commercial value to the Empire, since the produce of the Pacific finds its way out through them. Briefly, Australia, on account of its range of latitude, produces all types of products, of which cereals and wool are paramount; the export of frozen meat constitutes New Zealand's primary occupation. "Mediterranean" products have been successfully introduced into the "high" islands, particularly Fiji, whilst copra (for soap-manufacture) and tropical fruits are exported from the coral islands. Minerals, too, figure largely in many places. In exchange, textiles and manufactured goods are imported from England. Since the Netherlands is so far from being self-supporting, it is obvious how essential her Pacific domains are to her.

Yet in spite of the seeming prosperity of the Pacific region, many serious problems confront the Empire there. Firstly, international relations have complicated the politico-geography of the Pacific during recent years. Japan's position in the centre of the ocean, by her capture of German Micronesia, is of great concern to the United States, whose territories are here widely separated — from Manila to Panama as almost halfway round the earth. Into this area, Japan has thrust a long finger. If she affects American feeling, how much more seriously will it be taken by six million Australians. Furthermore, that Japan should have come into possession of the naval base of Jaluit in the Marshall Islands is an additional source of anxiety to Australasia, for this island is practically equidistant from Japan, New Zealand, and the nearest Australian port. In fact, it means that the Japanese have come two thousand miles nearer British Australasia. The significance of this will be seen later.

Another problem of the same nature, but connected with France, arises out of two island groups, situated fairly near the Commonwealth's north-east coast. — the New Hebrides and New Caledonia, which are of particular interest to her. The former are controlled by an Anglo-French condominium, which is not, unfortunately, a complete success.

POLITICAL SITUATION OF PACIFIC.

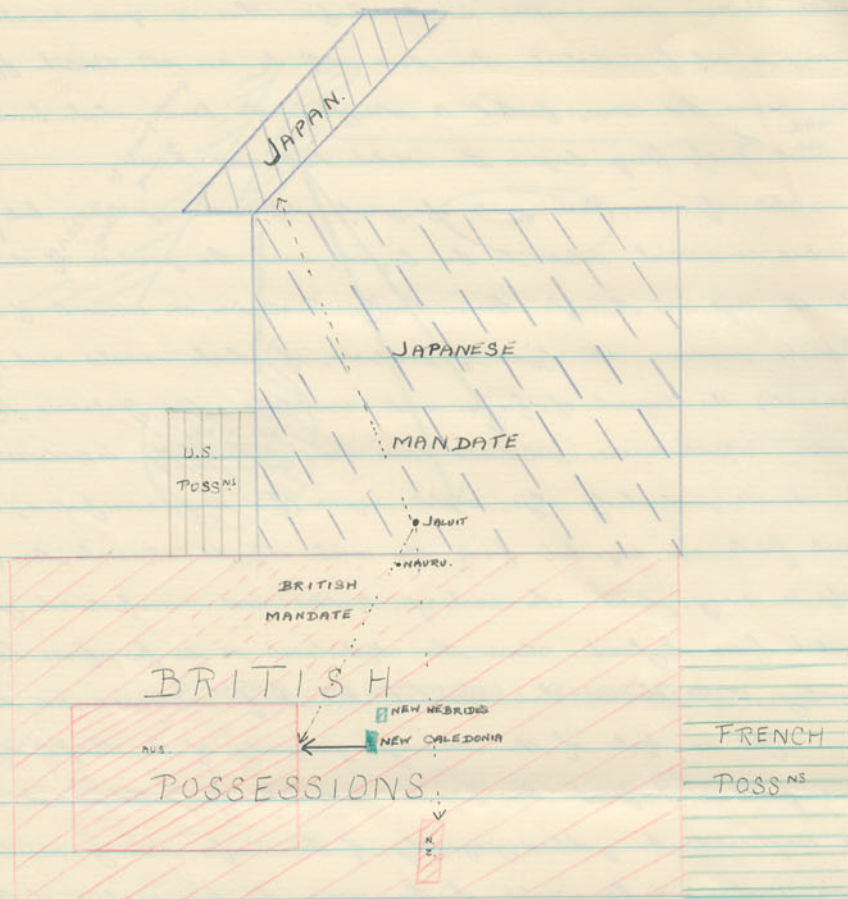


DIAGRAM SHOWING SIGNIFICANCE OF
FRENCH NEW CALEDONIA AND OF
JAPAN'S MANDATES IN THE PACIFIC.

The latter is of concern to France more strategically than commercially, for she is keenly aware of its position in relation to Australia.

Germany's intrusion into the Pacific has ceased to cause trouble for the present; at least, until she desires her colonies again. Nevertheless, the ex-German possession of Samoa led to one more question. Both Australia and New Zealand claimed it on the grounds that its phosphate was essential to their agriculture. However, by agreement, the United Kingdom and Australia each receive 42% and New Zealand 16% of the output.

The relative proximity of the United States to Australasia and her possession of the Panama Canal, the other key to the Pacific, gives rise to further anxiety on the part of Britain, were she ever to lose her supremacy, since the distance from England to Sydney is one and a-half times that from Panama. Let us therefore hope that the policy of disarmament will succeed.

No less important than the political situation of the Pacific are the racial questions. Were the Pacific problem a matter of strategy alone, Japanese intrusions would arouse less concern. But, unlike the whites, the Japanese are themselves excellent tropical colonisers. Consequently, Australia's greatest problem is that of population. The migration of coloured labour into the island-continent has raised the question of race exclusion to the rank of an international affair. Economists calculate that, as the majority of the world's future population will probably be Asiatic, it is reasonable to assume that they will overrun the semi-tropical undeveloped areas of Australia with its mere six millions. Therefore, how can the Commonwealth fill her empty spaces with Europeans, since she forbids coloured immigration? Experience has shown that it must progress proportionately with the country's development, and that not all immigrants are desirable. It must, therefore, take time. The "Yellow Peril" is counterbalanced by the Australian "all-white" policy. The stringent immigration laws — a would-be Chinese citizen may be given a detention test in Germany, for instance — prevent the occurrence of problems of race-intermingling such as have arisen in America. Moreover, the situation is not improved by the nearness of tropical northern Australia to huge overflowing Asiatic masses, and by the fact that the English are not suited to equatorial colonization. But Australia cannot afford

more able
to stand the
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rather

POLITICAL SITUATION OF PACIFIC.

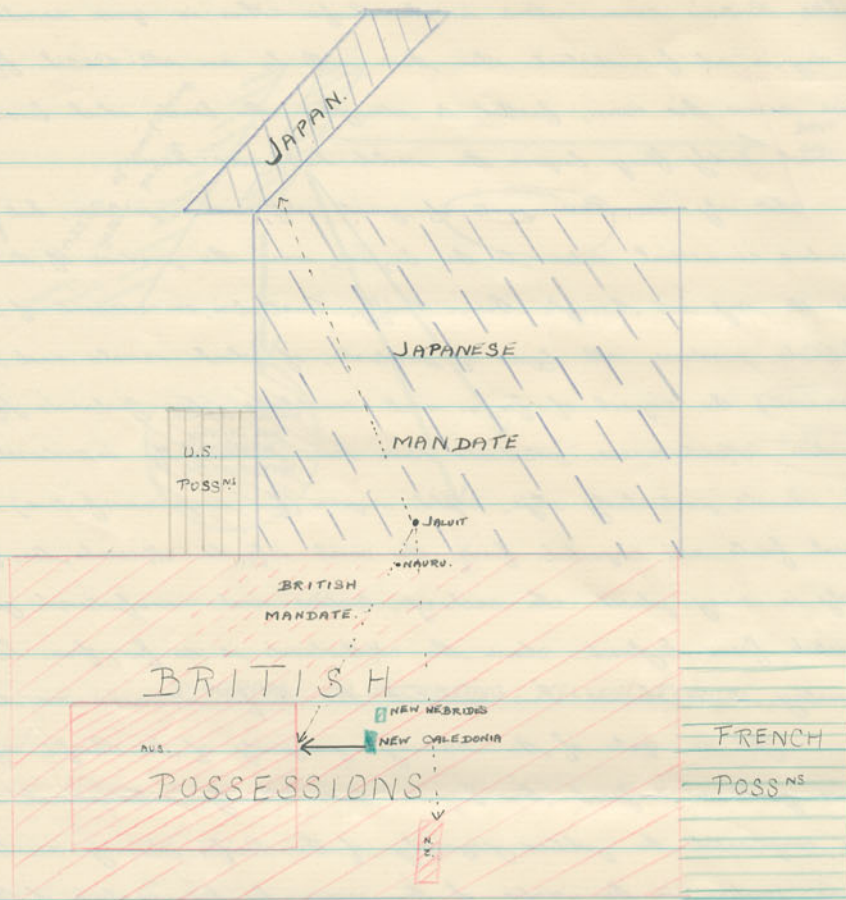


DIAGRAM SHOWING SIGNIFICANCE OF
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to have her labour markets flooded with cheap workers. Hence, her desire to accelerate European immigration, which is the only thing that can save the "White Australian Policy".

New Zealand, too, is confronted by the immigration question. She likewise urges the exclusion of undesirables, especially Asiatics, by imposing landing taxes of £100, and, since she has only 100 inhabitants to the square mile, she strongly encourages white immigrants.

In Fiji, also, the labour problem has given trouble. There, the East Indians, numbering 37% of the population, talked of racial equality until they worked themselves up into a bellicent mood, which resulted in serious disorders.

The "Yellow Peril" faces British Columbia as well. 200,000 Britishers and 27,000 Canadians are not a sufficient population for the area and advantage of this Pacific colony. Japan dreamed this long ago, and it is small wonder that she has hoped, slowly, to infiltrate this land with her superfluous people. Canada's policy is the same as Australia's.

New Zealand has a labour problem of almost international concern in her Pacific possessions, for the treatment of natives and conditions of labour were brought within the League scope by the Labour Convention of Paris in 1919. In her American mandates, for example, is the question of imported labour, hitherto derived from China. As the people of the British possessions in the Pacific become more numerous, they will present much more formidable opposition to the Yellow Peril. Yet Japan's friendliness renders antipathy difficult. In any case, an increase in population is of prominent importance.

Physical conditions concern us little, but something must be said of the natives of the Pacific. It must be confessed that British rule has been far from perfect. Indeed, Britain's conduct in Australia had a very black record, as our treatment of the aborigines was brutal until about 1876, so that the Tasmanians are extinct and only about one quarter of the Pacific population remains. "We deserve to be scourged for it before the world's tribunal". Indeed, but for the work of missionaries and the fighting qualities of the Maori, the Polynesians of New Zealand would likewise have been exterminated. Further, contact with the whites has not left the natives as they were

[Sir Harry Johnston in
Harmsworth's "History
of the World"]

originally, for new diseases and drinking habits acquired from traders have reduced their numbers and degraded them.

However, British rule has certainly not been without its advantages, for, on the other hand, missionaries have done much for their social uplift, as with the Maori. This has been furthered by the introduction of Christianity, which is supreme over Paganism in Fiji, for example. Britain's policy, moreover, has not been one wholly of extermination. Thus, whilst the indigenous population of Australia, New Zealand, and Fiji is less than half its original, and tends to diminish, elsewhere in the Pacific, in Tonga, Gilbert and Ellice, Santa Cruz, and the Solomon Islands, the population of native strains seems to be on the increase, for, in other words, the effect of the Empire upon the Pacific Islands has been entirely beneficial. Accordingly, on the whole, the natives have progressed very favourably under British control.

The white man, too, has generally taken full opportunities to ameliorate his new territories. Nevertheless, there are several alarming social dangers, particularly in Australia. Of these, one of the worst situations has arisen from the overcrowding of the cities: in Australia, the two largest have absorbed nearly half the population of the whole continent, Sydney and Melbourne alone having over two millions, or one third, between them, and in New Zealand, half the population is urban. To reduce this serious danger (for danger it is, as we have seen), the less attractive areas must be developed and hardships alleviated by aviation and radio, for instance. The extension of irrigation schemes in the useless spaces of Australia will help to provide facilities for the much-needed increase of rural population. Another problem depending upon the latter is that caused by the break-of-gauge on the Australian Railways. Whereas a passenger may travel by through train from Paris to Athens, a distance of two thousand miles in ninety hours, the traveller from Perth to Brisbane changes eight times, five owing to break of gauge, taking 170 hours to cover 3,500 miles. This would be a calamity in wartime, but cannot, like the other problems, be remedied until Australia has a denser population.

On the other hand, Australasian cities are perfectly up-to-date and the countries are quite prosperous. In short, Britain's Pacific possessions are progressing extremely well.

As for the future, will the policy of Empire Free Trade be adopted

with beneficial results? Will Imperial Conferences take place, not only in London, but elsewhere? Will travelling High Courts of Justice be necessary for the organisation of Imperial rule? One thing, however, is essential in the Pacific Empire co-ordination. Will Disarmament be a reality and not an ideal? Whether the natives will be improved by missionary work and wise government measures; whether they will become partners in commercial rivalry, or whether they will be degraded by debauchery, as unhappily some have already been - all remain to be seen. As for the islands themselves, these nearest the populous centres will become more like market-towns, veritable Summer Isles of Eden, set in dark purple gorges of sea, supplying the demand for tropical products. The small islands will be used as radio-stations, a use to which several are already put. As regards the future political control, if Britain, U.S.A. and Japan have their way, Germany will not reappear as a ruling power in the Pacific. The trouble will come when she asks for her mandated possessions, as undoubtedly she soon will. Canada, too, is not an disinterested party in the affairs of the Pacific Islands for they form stepping-stones between her and her great sister British Columbia. In short, with the recent changes of the world, will peace or war, strength or weakness in the years before us? Many are the problems, yet, after vicissitudes extending over more than a century, the Pacific seems to have found peace, prosperity, and (let us hope) political stability under British rule.

"L'Union fait la Force."

[Age on Good Friday, 1930 : 15 y. 9 m.
on Nov. 30th 1930 : 16 y. 4 m.]

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