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THE LADRONES AND CAROLINES

One feature of the peace protocol of Aug. 12th is receiving much less attention than it is entitled to. It is the last part of article 2, which provides that Spain shall cede to the United States "an island in Ladrone archipelago, to be chosen by the United States." Reference was undoubtedly had to Guam, which was seized by a United States convoy on the way to Manila.

Edward Van Dyke Robinson contends in the last number of the Independent that the Ladrones and the Carolines, taken together, are as important as the Philippines, though they have only 1,000 square miles of area and 46,000 population. His full contention is of course little short of the absurd. Nevertheless it contains a grain of truth. Mere size and population are not the only measures of the importance of a territory. Gibraltar has less than two square miles of area, but there is not money enough in the coffers of all nations to buy it. Great Britain would no more give up the key to the Mediterranean or Malta or Aden than it would consent to the disarming and unmanning of its navy.

Mr. Robinson remarks of the larger islands of the Caroline chain and the Ladrone group that they are in "every way fitted to serve as coaling, cable and naval stations, commercial ports of call and of supplies, and, if need be, fortified military posts." The two groups taken together lie near or upon the following routes, destined to become the great highways of Oriental commerce: Between Australia or New Zealand and China or Japan; between South America and Central or Southern Asia; between the United States and Central or Southern Asia; between the Nicaragua canal and Central or Southern Asia.

The two groups are to the Western Pacific much what Hawaii is to the Eastern Pacific. It is nearly 3,000 miles from the most westerly of these islands to Honolulu, and at least 1,200 to any good port in the Philippines. For Spain the Carolines and the Ladrones have never had great value. They are simply small patches of territory productive of little revenue and of no commercial significance. Spain is not a commercial nation. It has never derived any advantage nor could it derive any from the relations of the Carolines and Ladrones to the four routes of ocean travel pointed out by Mr. Robinson. It does not follow, however, that Spain would give them up except under compulsion or for a money consideration largely in excess of their present value. But the question from the American point of view is not what Spain wants, but what the future of the United States requires and what the equities of the case justify.

In this connection it must be borne in mind that if we do not acquire Spain's islands in the Pacific they may be sold to Great Britain, Germany, or some other power, and thus become a menace to our peace and our prosperity. Such an event should be provided against aside from all questions of our policy of annexing or not annexing the two groups.

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