TERRIBLE FIGHTING FORCE TO SUPPLANT WARSHIPS

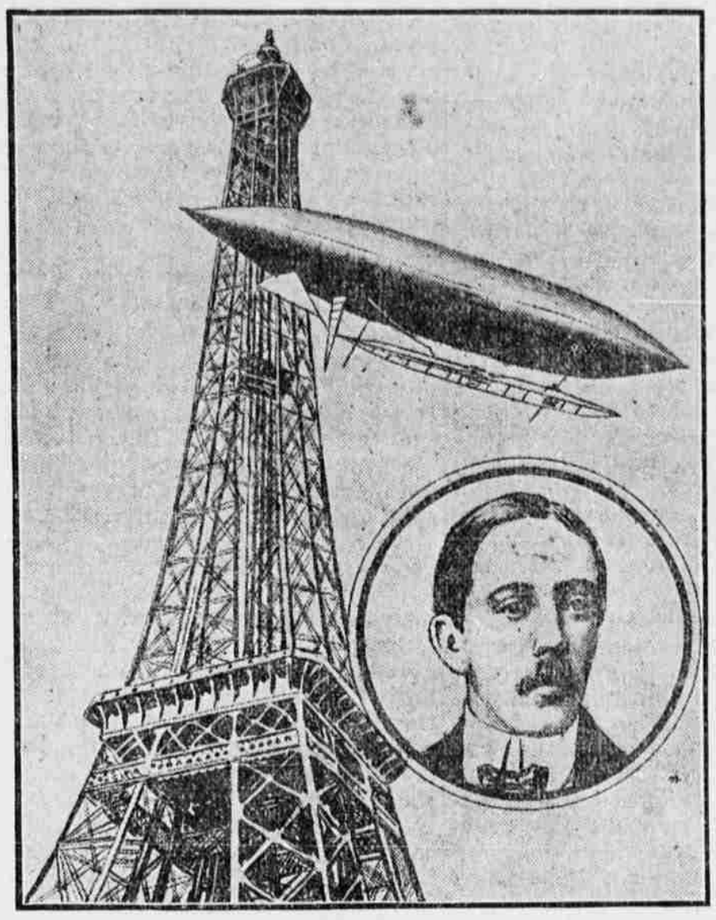
By RUSSELL WOODARD

(BRITISH HISTORIAN)

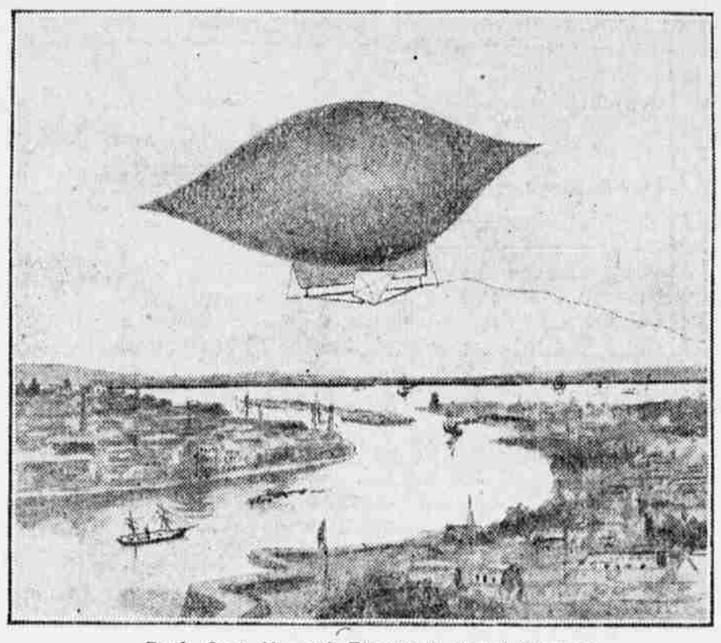
Expert Discourses on Japan's Navy Increase, and the Probabilities which Airships Hold Forth for the Dogs of War.

JAPAN is doubling its fighting strength on water. The eyes of the whole world are on the oriental kingdom, for the Japanese admiralty has started a decided innovation in accomplishing that purpose. An almost unbelievable amount of cash is not expended in this movement, but the Russian vessels, captured in the Russo-Japanese war, are being re-equipped, re-armored, more guns are being installed and the general appearance and strength of the entire navy, including the craft which were under the mikado's jurisdiction before the war, is being heightened.

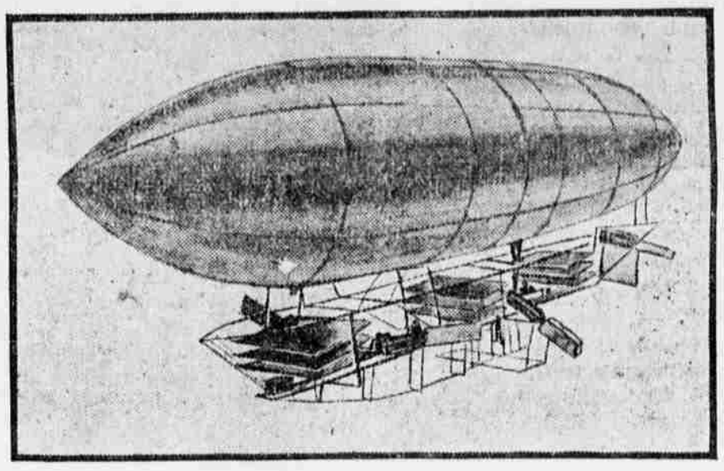
Into Japan's plans are being thrown the most modern of ideas and every possible weakness, noted in the recent war, is being banished in the strengthening process. Since the recent installation of a new Japanese cabinet, a part announcement of plans has been given to the world, and by the exertion of bits of imagination here and there naval experts declare they foresee one of the strongest navies which ever kicked up spray in the Pacific.



Santos-Dumont and His Airship.



Prof. Carl Meyers' Electrical Aerial Torpedo.



Model of England's Military Airship.

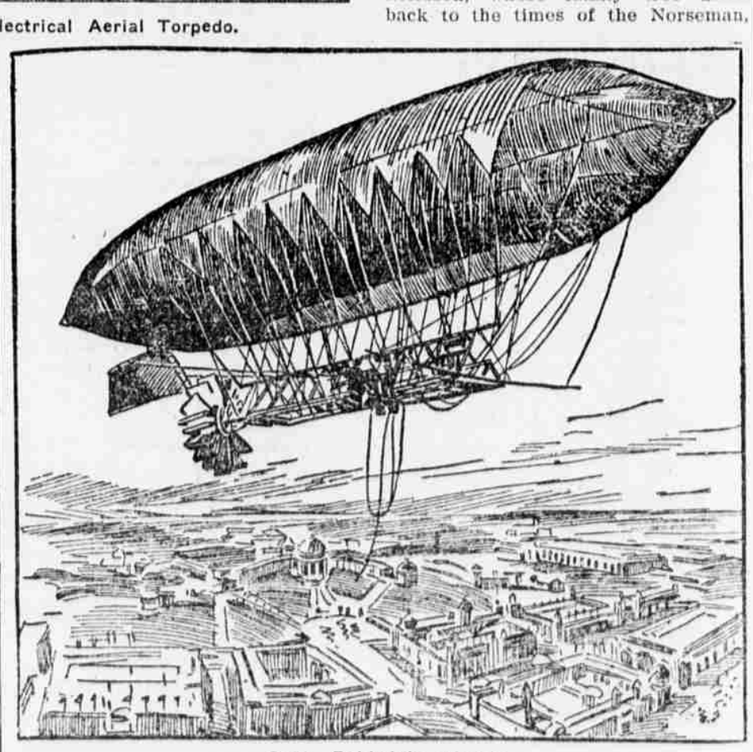
Here's the way it's being done, this being the official announcement given out by the Japanese admiralty bureau at Tokyo:

"The Japanese admiralty has decided upon a large scheme of rearmament instead of building new ships, the armaments of the old will be altered so as to bring them into line with the most modern ideas and with the requirements indicated by the war with Russia. Thus vessels of the Mikasa type which have hitherto carried four 12-inch guns and 14 six-inch will henceforth carry four ten-inch instead of 14 six-inch, so that their principal armament will be brought up to eight pieces of heavy caliber. In fact, their fighting strength will be doubled. Similarly in the case of vessels like the Retvisan, taken during the war, their new arament will consist of four 12-inch and four ten-inch pieces, the latter being substituted for the 12 six-inch which these vessels originally carried.

"When the programme is carried out it will have the advantage of creating a thoroughly homogeneous fighting force.

"First-class cruisers are to be added to the navy. These ships will have a displacement of 18,650 tons with a horse power of 44,000 and a speed of 25 knots. They will be 450 feet long over all with 80 feet beam and a draft of 25 feet. Their armor will be seven inches and their armament will consist of ten 12-inch guns, some six-inch and ten 4.7-inch. One of these ships is to be built at Kure."

Every year naval efficiency is reaching a higher plane and experts declare it to be a physiological certainty that a more powerful mode of warfare on the water must come. That has been the trend of events from time memorial. One may go back into history to the time when the Norsemen fought from rafts. Later came their crude canoes and then the Vikings. Several hundred years elapsed and big nations fought from behind bulwarks on wooden ships. Efforts were then made to put speed into the sailing vessels. The discovery of the steam engine helped this.



Capt. Baldwin's Airship.

Then came the eventual discarding of wooden vessels. This was brought about in America when the battle between the Monitor and Merrimac was fought and the fight in itself marked a step in naval warfare. The Merrimac embodied an idea up to that time unthought of in its armor of steel rails laid half a foot or more thick on its sides and top. No shells of that time were found able to pierce this arrangement. But the Monitor came along with its revolving turret, ironclad, and, northerners say, bested the Merrimac. Right in that battle were two steps in naval progress, and Capt. Ericsson, whose family tree dates back to the times of the Norseman, was the inventor of the biggest move towards a high standard of efficiency when he perfected the revolving, armored turret.

What this invention will be one can only guess and most of to-day's guesses are poor. From present indications, however, the airship is to be a factor, and when the inventor turns out an aeroplane which can carry men and shells in sufficient quantity to do real damage, then our impressive battleships will be melted into steel rails.

Each year the powers are putting more money into their marine fighting apparatus, and Germany and England, more especially, are eying each other's naval budget in an anxious matter. Most readers of foreign news will recall the session of parliament which dealt with the last British naval budget, the largest in the history of the nation. Emperor William of Germany, it was reported at the time, addressed a personal communication to Lord Tweedmouth, who had charge of the naval end of England's wellfare, asking the latter to cut his naval budget. This story was not denied, but talk of it was so avoided by officials that the British public to-day believe that the letter actually was received. It aroused criticism from all Britain. It is said that the kaiser realized that the two biggest nations of the old world must keep pace with each other in this line, and perhaps feeling that a large expenditure by Germany was not advisable, realized that the only avenue of exit from such a possibility was to see the British budget reduced.

President Roosevelt's feelings on the matter were amply told in the record of the last congress when he tried to get that august body to appropriate for four new warships. However, there there were too many men of peaceful and public buildings inclinations among the wearers of the toga and they dealt a solar plexus blow to the project, from which it only half recovered—to the extent of two warships. Both of these vessels have already been launched.

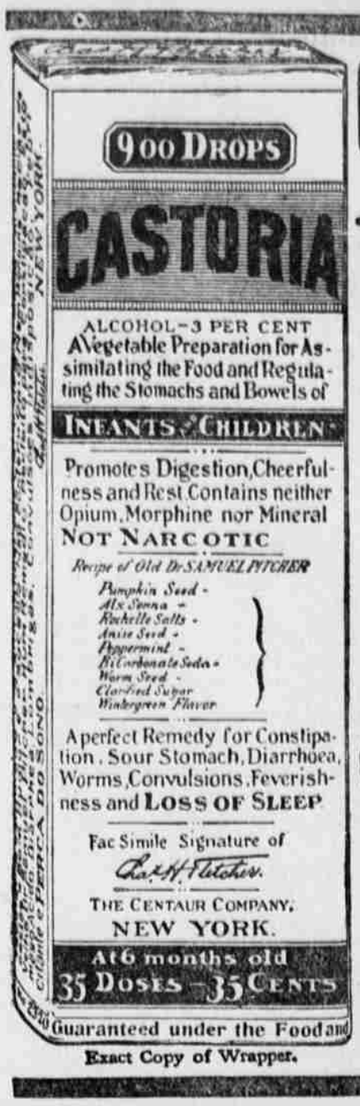
With Japan, the little terror of the far east, burnishing up its navy, the probabilities are that the powers may go even farther next year in expenditures for warships, and the only block to the great amount expended seems to be the devising of some new mode of warfare which will render warships useless.

Of course every country maintains a land force, but all realize that the best move against an oncoming enemy is to beat them to the battlefield, and as a consequence, the usual approach being water, the navies of the world are strengthened to their top-most point. Russia has not yet recovered from its set-to with the mikado's subjects, but the scrap left the Japs with a few more battle-ships and a splendid plan for strengthening their navy without expending great sums of money and contracting new loans.

Going farther into the probabilities of the new style of warfare which seems imminent, we may have battles of the air—a very dangerous mode of scrapping to the uninterested spectator below. Probably that would be the deadliest sort of combat known, for in "sinking" an airship every man aboard would undoubtedly be killed by hard compact with mother earth.

Then, on the other hand, perhaps there will be no future wars, at least among the large and civilized powers. Of course the barbarians will break out occasionally, but among the bigger nations there are now so many peace bodies that one has to walk about carefully in order not to encounter doves of peace, minus feathers. There are dozens of international peace and arbitration societies whose one theme is "don't shoot," and these hold sessions annually. It is said that they really cement relations between countries and the time may come when they will become so numerous that conflict will be impossible without slaying brothers. The Hague tribunal is another medium of the big powers, always ready to decide little disputes which threaten to develop into "international complications."

As a consequence it looks dark for the dogs of war and just as inky for the men of peace, who would keep the canines tied. But come what will, within a generation or two the world is to be given some new fighting force which will astound the nations, not in on the secret, to such an extent that there will either be an entire cessation of all hostilities or some two will get together and one will be made such a beautiful example of that the watching nations will decide that Gen. Sherman was right about war.



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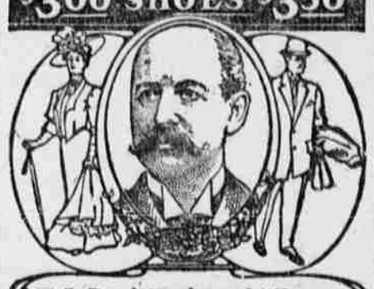

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