

THE VIEWS OF A DIPLOMAT.

Without Disclosing His Identity He Discusses International Topics—The Opening of the Japanese Imperial Diet.

Special Correspondence.
WASHINGTON, Dec. 23.—On the last day of November, 1904, the Japanese imperial diet was convened in Tokyo by the emperor with the usual dignified and solemn ceremonies. The principal object of this session, as explained by the emperor in his opening address, is to provide money for meeting the extraordinary expenditure incurred by the present war, as well as the usual expenses of the government. There is no doubt that the members of the diet will grant the required amount of money, as the war is an intensely popular project. In fact, there is no anti-war party in Japanese politics, as there would be in most countries under similar conditions. The Japanese people quickly forget political differences and unite in support of the emperor as soon as any foreign danger appears. An instance of this appeared in 1894, just before the Chinese-Japanese war. Japan at that time was almost torn asunder by quarrels over the finances and matters had become so serious that there was some danger of the total disintegration of the government. But in this crisis the prospect of a war with China appeared on the political horizon and the Japanese unanimously began preparations for the impending conflict, which they finally carried to a highly successful termination.

The experience of the Japanese in governmental matters has been unique, if not unparalleled, in the history of the world. With every nation a system of government is a natural growth, resulting from ages of experience combined with the support of the people. The Japanese system, however, is, so to speak, manufactured. They studied existing methods of government, selected the most satisfactory provisions of each, modified these to suit local conditions, and proclaimed the resulting system as the government of Japan. Wonderful as this method is, its success is even more marvelous. Another peculiar feature of the Japanese government is the rapidity of its establishment. The United States has been about 128 years in attaining its present position as one of the greatest powers in the world, and compared with the European governments, this is indeed swift development. But Japan has far outstripped even the United States in rapidity of growth. Fifty years ago Japan was a feeble, precarious kingdom, but now her position in the foremost rank of the family of nations is undisputed.

On account of these facts no political study is more interesting than that of the government of Japan. Nothing in the Japanese character better illustrates the executive and the legislative ability of the people than their system of government. It may be said, with considerable truth, too, that the system of government of any country is a true index of the standard of civilization in that country. According to this standard the most civilized country would allow its citizens the largest share of participation in the government. As the voice of the people in national affairs becomes weaker and weaker, so, too, the standard of civilization becomes more and more degraded.

At last the lowest stage, the despotism, is reached, where the people are allowed no share whatever in the government. Theoretically, the Japanese government is a constitutional monarchy. The emperor is the sovereign head of the people, but he exercises his executive powers with the advice of a cabinet whom he appoints. In his legislative functions he is assisted by the imperial diet. Compared with the European governments, Japan follows the German rather than the English model. The emperor is also the commander-in-chief of the army and navy, and as a reward for his skillful direction of the military and naval forces in the war with China in 1895 the diet voted the imperial estates 20,000,000 yen of the indemnity obtained through the treaty of peace. He has the exclusive right of originating amendments to the constitution, and his office is hereditary and of life tenure.

The council of state, or cabinet, as we would call it, is composed of three ministers of state, whose sole duty is to advise the emperor and the heads of the several departments of the government. This body is the supreme legislative and administrative authority, and it rules the districts of the country through appointed governors. The three ministers of state have a seat in and the right of addressing the imperial diet, but they are unable to vote.

The imperial diet is similar to our Congress. It is composed of an upper and a lower house, called the house of peers and the house of representatives, respectively, and is convened annually by the emperor. The most important function is the control of the finances of the country. All the expenses of the government require the consent of the diet, but the fixed expenditures allowed by the constitution to the powers of the emperor, to the organization of the different branches of the service, to the salaries of the government officials, etc., cannot be refused or decreased without the consent of the government. Appropriations for the use of the imperial household do not need the consent of the diet except for increase. By this ingenious method a hostile majority cannot antagonize the government by refusing to vote supplies.

The house of peers is largely composed of members of the imperial family, princes and marquises, who sit for life, and a certain number of counts, vicounts and barons, elected by their respective orders, sit for seven years. From each of the imperial cities and prefectures a member elected by the 15 highest taxpayers may serve for seven years, but the total number of elected and nominated members must not exceed the number of noblemen.

The Japanese constitution has an admirable provision to retain statesmen in public life. Here in the United States it has been a question for some years as to the disposition of our vice president and other valuable men who are retired by a change of administration. In this exigency the emperor of Japan has the power of appointing to life membership in the house of peers men of ability and learning. In this way a great admiral or a general may be honored for his military services, or a famous educator may receive official recognition for his scientific labors.

The house of representatives has about 375 members, who serve for four years, and are elected by the people. The necessary qualifications for membership in this body are 30 years of age and the payment of an annual tax. The average number of representatives from each prefecture is about seven, but the larger cities—Tokyo, Osaka, and Kyoto—have 12, 10 and seven, respectively.

The constitution occupies an important place in Japanese politics. It was voluntarily granted to the people in 1889 by the present emperor, and it is similar in wording and in construction to that of the United States. It contains 67 articles, defining the rights and duties of subjects, the imperial diet, the ministers of state and the judiciary, with supplementary rules. Along with the constitution 266 supplementary laws were published, containing additional information regarding the functions of the different branches of the service. As a whole the constitution is carefully worded, and the system of checks and counter-checks is well worked out.

In constructing the constitution usual liberties were allowed to the people, and they enjoy almost all the rights and privileges of American citizens. They cannot be arrested, detained or tried except by due process of law. Freedom from search, freedom of religious belief and freedom of free speech are guaranteed to every subject. All the existing classes of the people are well represented in the national diet, as the roll of the house of representatives shows members from all the political parties, as well as from almost every occupation.

Suffrage is at present limited to a small percentage of the people, but the number of registered voters is constantly increasing. This is caused by the stringent requirements of the law, which demands an age of 25 years, registration, one year's residence in the district, and the payment of a land or income tax. About 85 per cent of the eligible voters avail themselves of the franchise, and the masses do not take as much interest in political matters as is found in other countries, but this is a condition which will be removed by the gradual extension of the franchise.

The principal political parties are the Constitutionists and the Progressives. Besides, there are many short-lived parties, organized for some special purpose, and when this object is attained they cease to exist. For instance, during the five years immediately preceding 1895 the financial condition of the country was critical. This gave rise to many protests of discontent, and a "Financial Reform" party was organized. The government also recognized the necessity of improving this bad condition of the finances and it adopted the gold standard as the basis of its currency and a rising protective tariff. By this means the financial condition was improved and the "Financial Reform" party went out of existence.

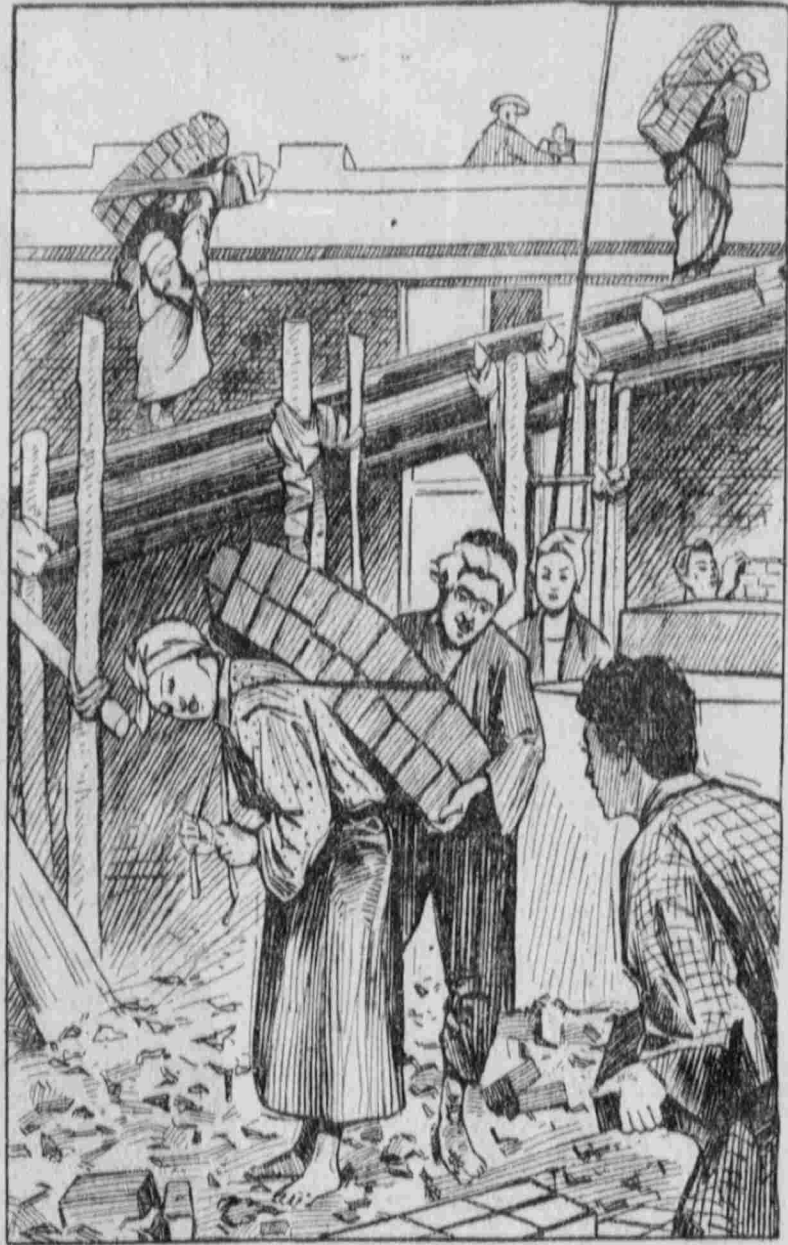
The Japanese political system has developed a new character which is formerly a distinctly American type. It is a Japanese "boss," and his methods are essentially similar to the American species. The most famous "boss" of Japan was Mr. Hoshi Tora, whose influence and ability made him a dangerous factor in political deals. He was educated in the United States and in England and learned the practical political methods of Maebashi. He quickly introduced them into Japan and became prominent as a political manager. He was never scrupulous in either language or in methods, and his participation in any political deal was a sure sign that his means would be carried through. He was assassinated by a fencing master while sitting in a room of the Tokyo municipal council.

The greatest defect of the Japanese government is the lack of any real power back of the statesmen. In England or in America the representatives are supported by a strong public opinion, and their official actions are likely to be consistent and vigorous. But in Japan public opinion has not developed to this extent. The Japanese statesman must act on his own initiative, and, though his policy may be beneficial, yet it has not the support of the people.

In addition to being a struggle between nations, the war between Japan and Russia is also a conflict of systems of government. It is democracy versus despotism. If, other things being equal, there is superior strength in a democratic form of government, as from the growth and strength of America, for instance, one should judge to be true, it should be demonstrated by this war. Indeed, the military and naval successes of Japan are strong evidences of the superior strength of a democracy as compared with a despotism. If Japan emerges from the war victorious it will be largely due to the form of government which allows the lowest subject to take a personal interest in matters of government.

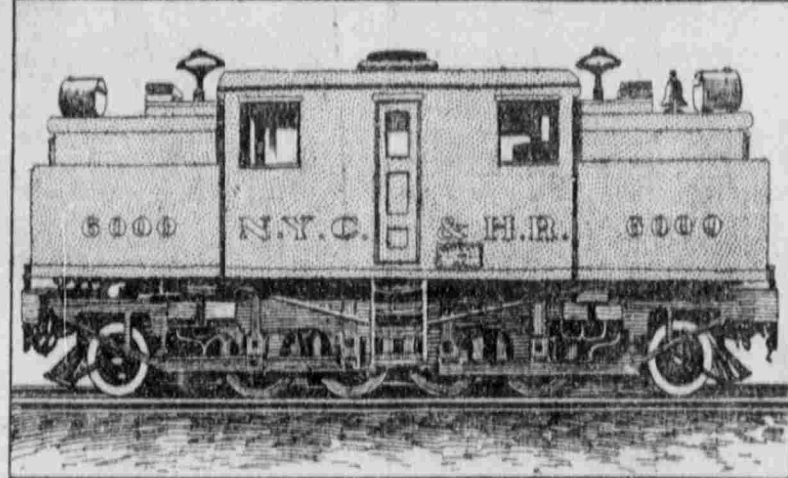
A DIPLOMAT.

WOMEN LABORERS ON JAPANESE ELEVATED RAILWAY.



The picture represents a scene which is by no means uncommon in Japanese cities. During the construction of the elevated railway at Tokyo a great number of women were employed in carrying bricks and mortar to the masons on the walls. The women themselves did not look upon the service as either degrading or extra laborious, and there were more applicants for the work than could be taken. It has probably never occurred to the Japanese woman of the poorer classes that she is in any way less capable of doing heavy work than is her husband of performing the duties of housemaid, which is also the custom in that remarkable fact there is no physical inequality of the sexes in the island empire.

A POWERFUL NEW ELECTRIC LOCOMOTIVE.



The cut illustrates a new form of locomotive which has been tested recently and will be put into active service by the New York Central railroad as soon as a sufficient number can be constructed. An advance order has been placed for between thirty and forty of these engines, all of which are to be used to haul passenger trains through the Park Avenue tunnel in the city of New York to Croton, on the main line, about thirty-four miles, and to White Plains, on the Harlem division, some twenty-four miles. This locomotive weighs eighty-five tons, has eight driving wheels and two pony trucks, is thirty-seven feet long and is 3,000-horsepower. It is estimated that it will make sixty miles an hour with a 500-ton train behind it.

Type of Fortress Against Which Japan Is Contending

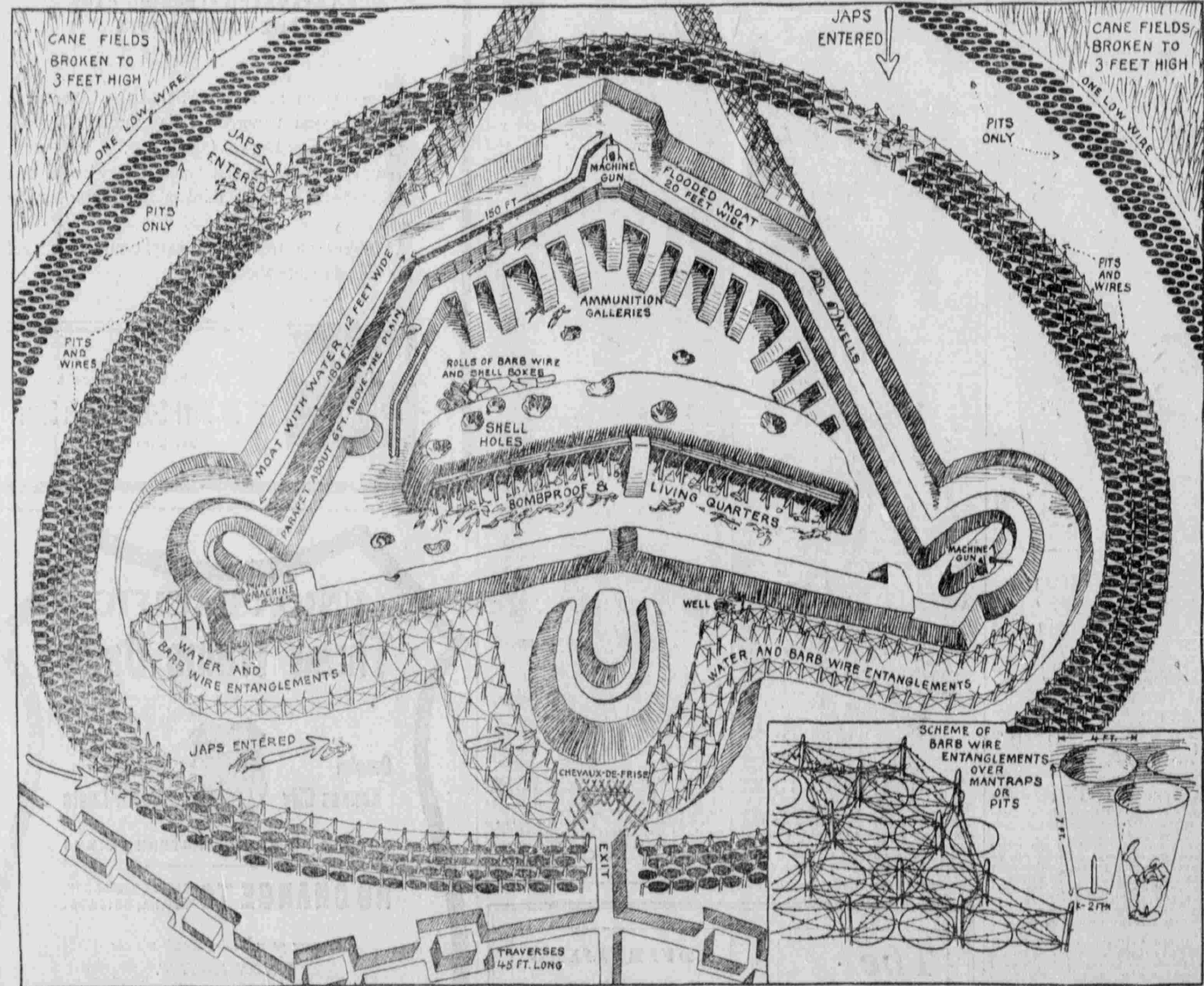
THERE is nothing so well calculated to convey an accurate understanding of the almost insuperable difficulties which have met the Japanese advance in Manchuria as a somewhat detailed study of one of the formidable redoubts which the Russians have constructed as the outer defenses of all the fortified points at which they have made a stand.

These earthworks are beyond question the most efficient ever built under similar conditions, and they are very numerous. At one point which was eventually dominated by the Japanese no less than eleven of these monstrous death traps stood between the eager assailants and their prey. They are so nearly alike, differing only in size and minor arrangements, that a description of one will suffice for all.

They are constructed on the level plain and are irregularly oval in shape. They are almost invariably surrounded by fields of grain, the inner boundary of which is marked by a single line of barbed wire stretched just above the ground. Immediately within this rather harmless looking and partially concealed wire are four contiguous rows of pits, each of which is a cruel and ingeniously contrived death trap. The pits are in the form of an inverted truncated cone and are about four feet across the top and two at the bottom. They are seven feet in depth, and the bottom of each is provided with an upturned steel spike of an especially murderous pattern. These yawning repulchers have swallowed many an advance troop of infantry, flushed with the day's successes and at eventide gallantly making a final charge across the grainfield, there to be precipitated by the hidden wire into the very arms of death.

Those who succeed in crossing this quadruple danger line reach a stretch of level surface which is free from any danger more deadly than that derived from the fire of the machine guns mounted in the horseshoe lateral of the parapet. An advance of a few hundred yards brings them face to face with another peril. This is also constructed of four parallel rows of pits like the outer scheme, re-enforced by an ingenious entanglement of barbed wire so woven and interwoven that passage across the barrier is well nigh hopeless. Once within this devilish system of mantraps, a fresh interposition in the form of a flooded moat presents itself. This immense ditch is from twelve to twenty feet in width and deep enough to check a sudden advance of foot soldiers. At its inner margin are located the wells which supply the garrison. By this time the fortification has assumed a triangular appearance and is outlined and further protected by a parapet six feet above the level surface of the plain. This strong earthwork is expanded into horseshoe lateral at the angles and apex, and these are provided with machine guns of the most modern type.

Just within the apex of the triangle are the ammunition galleries, which are bombproof, and the center of the inner inclosure are the bombproof living quarters for the garrison. Although these are excavations, an earthwork mound above them makes possible the entrance of sufficient air and light, so that these underground habitations are less uncomfortable than might be supposed.



A TYPICAL RUSSIAN FORT IN MANCHURIA, CAPTURED BY THE JAPANESE.

This brief description includes the essential features of the redoubt. In addition to this, the entire length of the base of the triangle, which contains the exit to the system, is further safeguarded. In the center and just within the parapet, guarding both the inner and the outer exits, is another horseshoe fort, and between this and the outer exit are fixed supplemental defenses in the form of bristling chevaux-de-frise. Beginning at the lateral horseshoe fort, the moat expands, and the water is filled with barbed wire entanglements. Between the two man-trap systems, and on both sides of the outer exit, traverses are interposed, making enfilading almost impossible. After becoming familiar with the plan of these almost impregnable redoubts, one ceases to marvel that 2,000 Japanese soldiers fell during a night attack on one of them. The wonder is that the valiant little men of the island empire have succeeded in breaking into so many of these strongholds. The cut shows the points at which this particular fortress was entered.

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