

MISCELLANEOUS.

AMERICAN PROPAGANDA.

(A BOOK REVIEW.)

The decisive factor in this last war for European hegemony was morale. In January, 1918, Winston Churchill declared: "It is a race on both sides between victory and revolution." Revolution crumpled the Central Powers before it hit France or Italy. Why? The war did not end in a break-through, but in capitulation. Were the Bulgarian, Austrian, and German peoples broken in spirit by false promises before they were crushed by arms? Did the propaganda of the Allies, and of America, mislead the foe into thinking that he would get a different peace than was actually imposed?

The answers to these questions will be diligently sought by historians; and they are now disturbing the minds of all men of honor in Allied countries—among whom, alas, some of our shining patriots cannot be included. If for enlightenment we turn to such books as *Adventures in Propaganda* by Captain Heber Blankenhorn (Houghton Mifflin, 1919) we shall be disappointed. We can find there an entertaining, though rough and ready, recital of life near the front, but little about actual methods of propaganda.

Captain Blankenhorn sailed for France with a small group of Intelligence officers on Bastille Day, 1918. He and his associates first inquired into the methods of the propaganda bureau in Paris. They crossed the Channel, sat at the feet of Northcliffe and Beaverbrook, and mingled with the little army of authors that Britain had mobilized to influence opinion at home, among neutrals, and in enemy countries. They then went to the General Headquarters of the A. E. F. and began the preparation of material to be scattered over the German lines. We gather that thousands of leaflets and postcards, printed for the most part in German, were let fly each week, from little balloons and aeroplanes, over No Man's Land. The material used consisted of invitations to surrender, facts about the military situation, and portions of President Wilson's speeches. The aim was to scatter, as thickly as possible, an artificial snow of printed argument over the enemy's battle zone. This work, in the American army, was gaining momentum, and beginning to be comparable with the wholesale propaganda efforts of the French and English, when the armistice cut it short.

The *Stars and Stripes* is quoted, January 3, 1919, as follows: "Of the thousands of prisoners who passed through the examining cage of a single American corps during the first fortnight of the Meuse-Argonne campaign, it was found, upon examination, that one out of every three had our propaganda in his pocket. . . . When our own propaganda was finally sanctioned, it was with this stipulation—that it should contain nothing but the truth. . . . As soon as President Wilson would give an utterance intended for the world (which includes the German army), the propaganda section would translate it into German and deliver it by the air route to all the areas within reach. . . . There were really two phases of the propaganda—the general arguments, designed to weaken the enemy's will to fight and addressed to all the troops as far back

as the aeroplanes could go, and the specific arguments, intended to persuade a soldier to throw up his hands and come over."

General Ludendorff has recently paid unwilling tribute to the effectiveness of this propaganda on the battlefield: "The (German) army was literally overwhelmed with the enemy's propaganda writings; whose grave danger was everywhere recognized. General headquarters set prizes for turning them in; but they could not be prevented from poisoning the hearts of our soldiers beforehand."

Incidentally Ludendorff, in a passage explaining why the German chiefs decided to accept an armistice rather than to attempt a last desperate defense, tells how the idealism of Wilson tipped the scale: "We were not yet bound to surrender unconditionally. The enemy would have to speak. Would he talk of conciliation or of violence? In my judgment of Clemenceau and Lloyd George, I feared the worst. Wilson, however, had often stated his terms in the most solemn form imaginable. He, and the great country he represented, must feel themselves bound in honor by these declarations."

The swift-moving events of those last days of the war will long be a subject of controversy. Evidence is accumulating that the victory was won more by propaganda than by power. Marshall Foch said in the spring of 1919:

"I knew nothing could balk me of victory once the Germans had accepted the final battle where they did. One thing only could have delayed defeat for them. That was to get all their forces from everywhere behind the Meuse. That would have been a formidable position. If they had done that—well, we might have been there yet. But they couldn't do it. Why? Because it would have been an open confession of defeat, and they dared not face the moral effect of that at home."

That was it: the disintegration at home. The German military caste must, of course, forever bear the chief responsibility. They themselves threw away a good part of their prestige. They, by their treacheries at Brest-Litovsk and by their brutalities and blunders in the West, broke the loyalty of the German people. But the point for us does not lie there. True statesmanship indicated one course alone to Germany: to liberalize herself, to overthrow her war lords, to become a republic, and at the same time to continue fighting until the weakening morale of her enemies gave her tolerable terms. That ending would have promised something for future peace. Captain Blankenhorn has imagination. He says, in his entry of October 15, 1918, "On the other hand, a really truly—so far as geography goes—war of defense, waged by a really truly attempted liberalized government, and it'll be a long war." It would have been a longer war; but it would have been followed by fewer wars after the war, and the settlement would not have thrown Europe back into despair.

Captain Blankenhorn, undoubtedly, was a good propaganda officer. He had an honest faith in the integrity of the cause he advertised. That the American Government was making promises which it would later fail to liquidate never seems to have occurred to him. And even now the whisperings of the national conscience appear to arouse little response. Assertions that the treaty is vastly too severe, and that it is grasping and imperialistic, are brushed aside as unpleasantly pro-German. It is too much to expect that in our world self-righteous nations, when victorious in a desperate war, will act on principles of honor with a scrupulousness which is to be observed, in the relations of individuals, only rarely.