

Books and The Book World Ludendorff's Excuses for Defeat

German Commander Is Shown as Poor Loser

By CORNELIS DE WITT WILCOX, Colonel United States Army, Professor of Modern Languages, West Point.

LUDENDORFF'S story is a plea in avoidance. His purpose is not the establishment of the truth, but the establishment of a case. In his presentation his work naturally falls into two parts, dealing with the eastern and the western fronts respectively. Equally naturally do these differ in interest and importance. It is even possible to feel that his account of the eastern operation is valuable in itself. Here, moreover, he is not without the grace of truth; for example, he admits that his great victory at Tannenberg was not his own. He merely marched his army forward. This obvious truth, of course, brings into relief the audacity of his plan, unless, indeed, he had private information that Von Rennenkampf would stand still. And so of all the operations on the Russian front; it is clear that he glosses over certain operations, but his account is at least that of a man fully qualified, as far as he goes by knowledge first hand, even though biased.

But neither the value of his work nor the world's estimate of its author will be determined by his career. In the east, Ludendorff eventually became the driver of the finest military machine that the world has ever known. That machine broke down, and it did so with his hand on the throttle. In these, his memoirs, he undertakes to show his countrymen, not the rest of the world, that they, not he, were responsible for this breakdown; that the army failed because the country, the civil side, had failed, and that it had done so in spite of his warnings of catastrophe awaiting it if his warnings continued unheeded.

"One Man" With Hindenburg.

Shortly after the fall of Lieke Ludendorff was ordered to the eastern front as Chief of Staff to Gen. von Hindenburg. For four years and more these two

worked together "like one man," says Ludendorff. Why not? After discussion with his assistants he would lay his "ideas for the initiation and conduct of all (Italics ours) operations briefly and concisely before the Field Marshal." And Ludendorff expressed his satisfaction in knowing "that from Tannenberg to my resignation in October, 1918, he (the Field Marshal) agreed with my views and approved my draft orders." The "one man" was Ludendorff. Von Hindenburg, after a few paragraphs in his praise in the forepart of Vol. I, virtually disappears from the narrative. In Ludendorff's pages he is only little less a dummy than the Emperor himself.

Only one man stands out in these pages: their author. In vain will the reader look for appreciations of the great commanders of either side. The Grand Duke Nicholas, to be sure, is, in so many words, admitted to be really a great soldier, but he constitutes a solitary exception. Foch is barely mentioned; Petain appears once, and then only as a relieving Nilvite; Haig once, perhaps not all. Ludendorff holds the stage alone; perhaps no other commander of a great army has in the whole realm of military history made so lavish a use of the pronoun of the first person. In so doing, but without intending it, he issues a challenge; in his preface he declares his purpose of giving "an account of those deeds of the German people and of their army with which my name will be for all time associated." He admits his responsibility, which indeed he could not escape if he would, but his manner of discharging this responsibility is a challenge to others to show cause why they should not be held responsible for the German disaster.

Did He Foresee Failure?

The chief interest of the book lies in the part, substantially three-fourths of the whole, devoted to the operations of the western front. If we are to believe what he says, it is difficult if not impossible to avoid the impression that on taking over the special control of this

front, which he did on August 26, 1918, Ludendorff felt that the work before him was to be vastly different from that of the East. It would almost seem as if from the outset he had adumbrated his defeat.

It is in this portion of his work that the man stands self-revealed. He was part of his mighty war machine. In greater measure than was the case with his adversaries, he could call upon all the resources of mechanical engineering applied to the arts of war. His troops were operating on interior lines in regular every square foot of which had long been known to them. They had suffered, of course, but so had the French and British. If the responsibility was his, so was the power. And yet he failed.

His failure is the extremity of bitterness to him. To explain it, to avert the blame from himself, he has recourse so to say to indictments, to arraignments. He goes so far as to say that he had "experienced" in war. His best officers, those of the old Corps of Officers, are all dead. Of course the French and British had kept theirs, that is, if he would admit that the British had ever had any.

Food Supply and Morale.

He stands on surer ground when he finds in the shortness of the food supply one reason for the fall in morale of both the army and of the people at home. But his views on the blockade that caused the shortage are original. England established it in order so to weaken the body of the people, and to bring the poison of propaganda. An incidental purpose was to make war on children still unborn, "so that a physically inferior race might arise in Germany." To starve Germany by blockade was a heinous and odious violation of international law; to starve England by submarines was entirely legitimate.

On the political side, the Emperor is no longer an Emperor, but the Entente has a Wilson, a Clemenceau, a Lloyd George. As for Germany it has no statesmen; chancellors it has, and secretaries of state, but these are not statesmen; they do not realize the importance of the army to the state. They have power, or could have it by seizing it, but they do not use it, either from impotence or cowardice. The enemy propaganda is victoriously effective both in the army and at home, but against Germany has no defence. And the propaganda had been busy for years before the Entente forced the war upon Germany. "Even the Marne lodges of the world, as had long been planned by England, worked in the service of the Anglo-Saxon."

It was perfectly correct, it was wise, to send Lenin and Trotsky to Russia in order to sap that country, but it was monstrous to allow their doctrines, once they had done their work in the enemy's territory, to invade that of Germany. It was the people at home, with their government in the hands of the enemy, that never failed. Upon this lament he never fails to ring the changes. The army, in spite of the increasing number of deserters and shirkers, was still brave and heroic, still equal to its task, but as the stress grew, it needed more support from home and never got it. And so he goes on, criticizing the tentative peace negotiations, the submarine, the Government, its allies, the Ministers, the roads, the weather, the mud, the food, the morale, the obstinacy of the Entente, its ruthlessness, even his own army.

The Great "Drives" That Failed.

And yet, in spite of all these complaints, when he opened his great offensive on March 21, 1918, he had 206 divisions to the Entente's 160. He attacked at the weakest point, with what success the whole world knows; drove through and stopped. He is under no illusion about the matter; brilliant as was the feat, strategically it was a disappointment. Similarly of his effort of May 27—it forced no decision. True to form and perhaps "according to plan," Ludendorff is ready with his reasons for these failures—deterioration in the army's morale, due to the reenrolment of men returning from captivity in Russia; depression caused by the monotony of the stations, epidemic spirit among the Bavarians, reaction of the homeland under the pressure of "hostile propaganda and of speeches made by enemy statesmen which were directly leveled at us."

But, as elsewhere in his pages, of the remarkable effort made by the Allies not one word. We Americans perhaps form an exception. At Chateau-Thierry "Americans, who had been a long time in France, had bravely attacked our thinly held fronts, but they were not fully led, attacked in dense masses and failed." Just as was the case against the French and British, "here, too, our men felt themselves superior."

It is not surprising to assemble a few of the things he says about us, for he loses no opportunity to cheapen our collective fighting ability. Thus the American attack on July 19, made in the Marne salient, broke down. "The six American divisions that had taken part in the battle had suffered most severely without achieving any successes. One division appears to have been broken up in order to bring them up to establishment. Notwithstanding the gallantry of the individual American soldier, the inferior quality of the American troops is proved by the fact that two brave German divisions were able to withstand the main attack by very superior American forces for several weeks."

In spite, however, of this persistent depreciation of our troops it is evident that from the start our intervention cast a menacing shadow on Ludendorff's soul in the event of the German Day. The matter finally boils down to "the fact that these new American reinforcements could release English and French divisions on quiet sectors" and so "weighed heavily in the balance against us. This was of the greatest importance and helps to explain the influence exerted by the American contingent (!) on the issue of the conflict. It was for this reason that America became the deciding factor in the war."

LUDENDORFF'S OWN STORY, August, 1914-November, 1918. Two volumes. Harper & Brothers.

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PASTORAL

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If it were only still—
With far away the shrill
Crying of a cock,
Or the shaken bell
From a cow's throat
Moving through the bushes,
Or the soft shock
Of wisened apples falling
From an old tree
In a forgotten orchard
Upon the hilly rock!

Oh, grey hill,
Where the grazing herd
Licks the purple blossom,
Crops the sticky weed!
Oh, stony pasture,
Where the tall millium
Stands up so sturdy
On its little seed!

A Strong First Novel

Peter Kindred, a first novel, has a pervasive autobiographical suggestiveness. It begins with the boy leaving home to go through Exeter, then Harvard; at Radcliffe he meets the girl he later marries. The story continues through his search for a job after college and his marriage with Joan, who also has her job and sticks to it with the result that she eventually gives birth to a dead child.

Peter is an earnest, Puritanical fellow, who confesses to no sense of humor, but has a nice feeling for beauty. Sensitive, he is neither strongly emotional nor profane. Mr. Nathan, the author, has done the task he set himself honestly and carefully. But the book is so subjective (no character lives as an entity outside the mind of Peter, or Mr. Nathan, and all attempts to follow the lives of the others beyond Peter's presence are faltering) that we shall wait with interest to see whether Mr. Nathan has within him the creative imagination for other books.

Were Peter Kindred not thoroughly typical of a large number of young intellectuals at the present time, the book would have little interest. But he is. He is "high brow" with tortoise shell rimmed glasses, at least so we picture him, and the girl he loves, Joan, wears low heels. Plenty of such couples are turned out by our colleges nowadays, rigid in their principles and conventions.

Joan and Peter, for instance, are shockingly idealistic about marriage until an unhealthy nervousness overcomes them both. Joan is one of those modern women who attempt two jobs, house-keeping and office work, and whose vitality is drained in consequence.

Mr. Nathan cleverly avoids posing any problems or making "propaganda" for his ideas. We are left absolutely to judge for ourselves.

PETER KINDRED. By Robert Nathan. Duffield & Co.

Dostoevsky Fantastic

Caprices of Dostoevsky's sombre fancy are the short stories which make up the ninth volume, entitled *An Honest Thief*, of Constance Garnett's translation of his works. (Macmillan).

Perhaps *Uncle's Dream*, which is the longest of the stories, is also the best worth considering. It has the old classic situation of the ambitious mother trying to marry her daughter off well with the environment of the small town and its prince, false-whispered, and a courtship, who chances to visit the town. The climax is a scene where the mother finds herself frustrated publicly in the presence of the old gossip. It is broadly, wildly, and humorously told; the Dostoevsky version of the slapstick; the crescendo with its billingsgate lines might be played in a circus ring.

The distinctions of *Uncle's Dream* are a subtle scrupulousness in working out the human motives, an almost scientific analysis of the mother's matchmaking technique.

Another story, *The Crocodile*, gives Dostoevsky opportunity to satirize the workings of human vanity, which he treats so powerfully in his novels. A man swallowed by a crocodile reveals in the notoriety of his situation and exploits it, screaming wisdom through the reptile's hide to the crowds of spectators.

But with all the grotesqueness in which he reveals in these stories the great and gloomy Russian never goes far from his ideas. We are aware of something of what, as he sees it, humanity and human frailties make of life.

AN HONEST THIEF AND OTHER STORIES. By Fyodor Dostoevsky. The Macmillan Company.

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Dustcloth and Ashes

THE changing world has been too much with Mrs. Katherine Fullerton Gerould—a world where parlormaids can't be had while social workers are superabundant, where science pure and applied is crowding culture to the bow-wow, where "the delicacies of nice girls and gentle breeding are shamefully traduced by a whole syndicate of realistic British novelists, and where, if there is to be a future for one's children in the finer reaches of the spirit, one must withdraw with one's compatriots to the "self-conscious minority" (one's own phrase) into a cooperative cloister, buying vacuum cleaners and such things to save oneself coarsening contacts, skimping along on bread and milk instead of meat, spending one's spare pennies on books—not "caviare out of season," and (presumably) getting one's living by taking in one another's washing!

This world has both tired one and made one tired. And the exceedingly clever Mrs. Gerould, whom we have to thank for several of the few, the very few, short stories of late years which we can respect, must not complain if the decidedly self-centered and short-sighted social attitude manifest in a number of her essays, *Modes and Morals* (Scribner), makes tired some even of her sincere admirers, among whom the present reviewer counts himself.

That the issue of the Labor party in Great Britain, the excesses of our own skilled labor in squandering inflation wages and in striking, even the death of domestic servants, might be social symptoms of profound and general economic changes does not seem to have occurred to Mrs. Gerould. Nor does it that, if comfortable living and high thinking are become possible to some of the self-elected, even plain living has become a grim problem to others whose electness, so to term it, would probably hold color in the wash.

Before reading *Modes and Morals* we cordially detested several social service workers; often wished we had a parlormaid to run the furnace, cut the grass, bathe the dog with sea soap and wipe the dishes evenings when there had been guests; took a sip of wine of the earnest preoccupation of certain British authors with sex. Now we're converted.

We love all social service workers. We glory in the dignity of our labors around the house. There is only one god of art, Prapusa, and Mr. W. L. George is his prophet. Such is the potency of Mrs. Gerould's pen!

It is fair to say that *The Seasonal Ear* and *The Remarkable Rightness of Rudyard Kipling* are essays we would not willingly be without.

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