

# "Victorious": America at War

Reginald Wright Kauffman's Novel Is a Panorama Reaching From Pennsylvania to France, Done With a Perfection Marred Only by Some Military Misconceptions

IN his new story, *Victorious*, Reginald Wright Kauffman gives us, for the first time, a novel based on America's experiences in the war that as nearly encompasses the greatness of that experience as it is possible for one work of fiction to do. His chief aim, we take it, was to write an absorbing story; and in this he has succeeded admirably and completely. For *Victorious* is one of those tales that seizes the reader's interest with its opening sentence and has the power to hold that interest to the very end. In addition to writing a story Mr. Kauffman tried to picture how the war affected a little group of Americans at home and abroad; what our army did in France; what impediments it met with in becoming an army; and how gallantly our soldiers fought their way to victory. Crusader of old against the evils of our social and political systems, Mr. Kauffman takes up the cudgels against the press censorship and that unmilitary inertia of Americans which sent us into the Great War for Civilization unprepared either on land or sea, although here he confines himself solely to the unpreparedness of the army.

If much of the matter of this tale covers familiar ground, as must needs be in our voluminously described war, there is nothing familiar or conventional in the manner with which Mr. Kauffman begins his tale. For premonitory thrill and arresting interest few things in contemporary fiction can equal the series of eight or ten pen pictures of the chief characters of the tale as day comes to them, and passes in its important moments on April 2, 1917. We see Sarah Brown getting the breakfast of Andy Brown in a shabby cottage in Americus, Pa., in the Pennsylvania Dutch belt. We see Minnie Taylor going to early market and indulging in her mild flirtation with Chrissy Shuman, son of an Amish farmer. We see Andy Brown beginning his day's work as a cub reporter on the *Americus Daily Spy*, and we snatch a bit of gossip between Col. Eskessen, editor of the *Spy*, and his old crony, Lawyer Dickey, which fairly represents the two shades of public opinion in the United States about the President's course regarding the war at that time. We are introduced to Andrew Blunston, war correspondent, in his hotel in New York, making ready to go to war if it comes; we listen to Sylvia Raeburn, the actress, making a momentous decision over the telephone; witness the upsetting of B. Frank McGregor, contractor, from his luxurious bed in Chicago; we read, over Louis Garcia's shoulder, the cause of his being dismissed from his job on a New York newspaper; we learn how Tac, the police dog, happened to become one of the mascots of a company of U. S. Marines down in Haiti; how Léonie Picaud was driven from her home in France by the Germans; and we read once more the final paragraph of a speech made by "a lantern-jawed man" in the Capitol at Washington



Reginald Wright Kauffman

to Congress on that momentous April 2, 1917.

Then we plunge into the story. To give Andy Brown a chance to go to France as a correspondent Andrew Blunston permits Andy to take his place, spending the interval before the young reporter gets his War Department permit in training the youth for his work. The spring of this unusual proceeding is to be found in the fact that Blunston was in love with Andy's mother long ago. And so Andy goes to New York with Blunston, who watches him board the troop transport after a night at the theatre, where Andy sees Sylvia Raeburn on the stage and, such is the strange and lovely imagery of youth, she becomes another Jeanne Darc for him.

### II.

Whether his tale had to have its villain or whether Mr. Kauffman acquired a strong distaste for the army censorship in France we are not certain. But the villain is there in the person of that Louis Garcia who lost his job on a New York newspaper and has become a Lieutenant in the American Army on duty in the censor's office in Paris. To him Andy goes on his arrival in the City of Light, and

Garcia causes him endless trouble so long as Andy remains a correspondent. To Paris also comes Sylvia Raeburn as a Y. M. C. A. entertainer, accompanied by Tac, the erstwhile mascot of the marines; and also we come upon B. Frank McGregor. The contractor is another of the villains of the piece, although his evil doings are not clearly traced. He seems to be concerned with preventing the American Army from getting its necessary supply of airplanes, to what end is not made plain. But Garcia is one of his tools, held in terror of being sent "into the line" by some power McGregor holds over him, and as Andy Brown's correspondence home is of a character to cause trouble to McGregor and his political friends in the United States, Garcia is forced to try to prevent any of Andy's correspondence getting to America.

So Andy wrote letters home to Blunston for his syndicate, and Andy's correspondence failed to pass the censor. McGregor tried to convince Andy, smoothly, after the manner of a lobbyist, that his heat in the matter was all wrong. And then in sheer disgust the young Sir Galahad of correspondents resigned his job and

tried to get a friendly messenger to take some of his correspondence home.

Being foot free and moved by the imminence of the need for every man who could fight, Andy went into the army, which enables Mr. Kauffman to give us his picture of war as it was fought by the Americans in 1918, the kind of war we had been reading about for four years—bloody, hideous fighting that no familiarity acquired in the pages of *Under Fire* or Empey inures us to. Mr. Kauffman gives us glimpses of Andy at Aix during a "permission," where he meets Sylvia again. Then come trench raids, going over the top, and in a moving climax Andy dies fighting.

### III.

Here are the bald outlines of a tale that has many passages of romantic and tragic beauty. Among such we recall Andy's departure from his home in that shabby house in Americus; the homecoming of Chrissy Shuman to talk for a Liberty Loan as a wounded hero; Chrissy's love affair with Léonie; the luring of Garcia by Sylvia Raeburn in her effort to recover Andy's papers; and that final battle, so far as Andy was concerned, in the narrow streets of Mirande-La-Faloise. Moreover, the story has the elements of greatness in that it is both an admirable panorama of the war in its actions and reactions on the men and women of our country while hostilities lasted.

In its purely military aspects, however, we do not think Mr. Kauffman has been at all fair. He only looks at the censorship from the viewpoint of the journalist, never at all from that of the military man. In a sense this is only natural since it is the profession of the journalist to tell things about war and that of the military man to conceal them. And also his astonishment over our failure in the matter of artillery is wholly one-sided. What newspaper man would think in the ordinary course of his day's work that an innocent item about military stores in a corner of his paper would cause the loss of 600 men? As witness the classic incident of the New York *Tribune* in the civil war and Sherman's losing 600 men at Goldsborough, N. C. Or who among us remembers Gen. Crozier pointing out in 1906 that if he had an appropriation of \$1,200,000 for artillery he could begin a programme that could be completed by 1919?

These are blots on the tale. But they will only be appreciated by his military readers; and the great American public will pass them over as it has been doing since the United States was a nation. Not the least of our national weaknesses is that we do not take military affairs seriously until we are plunged into war. And then our critics never know enough of our history to place the blame where it belongs, in the gross indifference to such things of every last one of us.

VICTORIOUS. BY REGINALD WRIGHT KAUFFMAN. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company. \$1.75.