

## Mr. Churchill's War

**T**HE command of armies and the organization of industry in time of war call for the highest technical and executive ability; but the greater task of effectively coordinating the various civil, military, and political powers of whole nations demands nothing less than genius. In his study of the War, *THE WORLD CRISIS, 1916-1918* (Scribner's, 2 vols., \$10.00), Mr. Winston Churchill finds no outstanding strategic genius, either among the allied or the enemy leaders. The art of war, he tells us, had fallen into helplessness in 1918 when the whole strength of the belligerents was at last brought into the struggle. The problem was to procure a swift decision and spare humanity the horrors of protracted warfare; but the solution was not to be arrived at by strategy.

Instead, for over three years the great armies of Europe carried on the indecisive butchery of trench warfare, and in the end came victory by attrition, — a victory which we know now to have been almost as disastrous to victors as to vanquished.

And why should the view be limited to the theatre in which the best and largest armies happen to face each other? Sea power, railway communications, foreign policy, present the means of finding new flanks outside the area of deadlock. Mechanical science offers on the ground, in the air, on every coast, from the forge or from the laboratory, boundless possibilities of novelty and surprise.

Thus it was that victory by exhaustion entailed far-reaching enervation in every field. And in the main, one must agree with Mr. Churchill's thesis. He states his case ably and clearly, and supports it with an imposing array of statistics, charts, and quotations.

Discussion has arisen as to the author's bias against the "epaulets" in favor of the "frocks", but the closest reading of the disputed passages reveals no prejudice. Mr. Churchill's characterizations of his colleagues are outspoken and intimate, but not unfair. In his judgment of Admiral Jellicoe's strategy in the battle of Jutland, he avoids facile criticism by cor-

rectly pointing out that the British Commander-in-Chief, as no other man, — sovereign, statesman, or general, — could have lost the War in the space of two or three hours.

Similarly, in taking the allied command to task for its lack of strategic ability, he gives credit to the individual leaders for the spirit that animated them at all times and the steadfastness of their purpose. His commendation and criticism supersede war-time judgments. Many Allied generals, among them Joffre, Robertson, Nivelle, and Kitchener are criticized, while certain German generals, and particularly Ludendorff, receive credit for their ability. There is this to be said in favor of the rank and file of German generals as opposed to the Allied commanders, that up to 1918 both in offensive and defensive operations they succeeded in sparing their troops more than half the casualties suffered by the Allies.

The work as a whole presents a wide panorama of the military operations during the crucial years of the War. There is, however, one important omission in Mr. Churchill's selection of material. He gives far too little attention to the Russian front and to the rôle of Austria in the War. It is a common failure of war historians to forget the important part played by the Austrian Empire in its fatal struggle with Russia. In spite of being a confessed "Easterner", Mr. Churchill refers but briefly to events on the eastern front and passes over without any mention the Caucasian and Persian theatres of war.

Having served as First Lord of the Admiralty, as Minister of Munitions, and as Secretary of State for War, Mr. Churchill was not only able to view events from the point of view of Downing Street, but also from that of the battlefield, for he distinguished himself in France as a Lieutenant-Colonel in 1916. A reading of this work gives the lie to the theory that contemporaries are unable to view events of which they have been witnesses in proper historical perspective. If this has been generally true in the past, Mr. Churchill's brilliant and comprehensive treatment of his immense subject establishes a new standard in recent historical writing.

GEORGE NEBOLSINE

# Gantry, the Devil's Saint

*ELMER GANTRY has been branded at once the truest and falsest, the fairest and foulest, the most heroic and most cowardly book of this frank, prolific and artistically pregnant age. In so much propaganda, is there no art? No permanence? If so, what is its quality and value? The literary merits of the book, — if any, — have been largely obscured by prejudiced praise and vituperation. THE FORUM, therefore, offers a prize of one hundred dollars to the reviewer of ELMER GANTRY who, in the opinion of the Editor, succeeds best in assessing its literary value. The only condition of eligibility for this prize is that the review must have been published in some magazine or newspaper before August 1, 1927, and must be submitted to THE FORUM before August 15. The following review is the only one that will appear in these pages.*

**E**LMER GANTRY (Harcourt, Brace, \$2.50) is dedicated to H. L. Mencken. Much of it sounds as if it were dictated by him. Much of its phraseology has a familiar sound to a reader of the "Mercury". It presents, in fiction form, the Mencken philosophy regarding American Protestant Evangelical sects. Its importance as a book depends, however, not upon its indictment of organized religious hypocrisy and bigotry, but upon its accuracy as an authentic and artistic picture of American civilization. It is necessary to mention this because American Protestantism, especially the Evangelical branch, is unlike anything else on earth. This reviewer, who was reared in England as a Methodist, welcomes *Elmer Gantry* as a timely book. But if it had been less bitter, less extravagant in its portrayal of the intimate connection between religion and lust, it would have been more successful.

It is also a little too long. The Sinclair Lewis technique is now familiar to the world in a remarkable gallery of American scenes. That technique consists of a vivid caricature entirely surrounded by livid, flash-light photographs. The power of this method is undeniable. Each face is painfully recognizable, but the intensity of the illumination emphasizes the sinister features and destroys every vestige of beauty and softness. This is attained by minute attention to detail, by a tireless accumulation of data. Lewis, with less genius, is like Kipling. He uses English in much the same way and he collects his material in exactly the same way. The cumulative effect is tremendous, but the weight of so much material needs a strong frame on which to rest. If a reviewer may offer a

suggestion, it is that Mr. Lewis shorten his novels. *Arrowsmith* began to drag when Leora died, and should have ended there. *Elmer Gantry* drags after the attractive evangelist, Sharon Falconer, is burned to death; and the final scenes are deliberate muck-raking reporting.

The blurb on the jacket says the novel is "a work of art". That is for competent judges to say, not anonymous blurb-writers whose English is at times poor. This calls to mind William Allen White's recent comment. It seems that a short time back, Sinclair Lewis, — while gathering material, — stood in the pulpit of a Kansas City church and dared God to strike him dead. Mr. White, after reading *Gantry*, recalled the episode and remarked that apparently God had taken Mr. Lewis at his word and had struck him dead artistically.

The chief impression one has in putting the book down is that of an undisciplined vitality. It is like reading a book by Dostoyevsky which has been rewritten to suit "True Stories" magazine. The trouble is that all the characters, save one or two minor ones, are ignoble. Once the character of Gantry is clear to the reader it becomes plain that he has in him nothing of normal decency and goodness, and the only way in which our interest can be maintained is to pile horror on horror. Are evangelists and preachers like this? Here and there, no doubt. In so large a population it is inevitable. But Lewis, at times I fear, is spiteful. He has very nearly defeated himself. *Elmer Gantry* will be read and fought over and attacked, and will possibly start a reaction. But *Babbitt* remains the Lewis masterpiece.

WILLIAM MCFEE