

PSYCHOLOGY

# Propaganda Is Found Ineffective When Minds Are Not Ready

## Atheists and Believers Hearing Same Arguments For and Against a Personal Deity Retained Opinions

*One of a series of timely releases on war propaganda prepared by the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, a group of psychologists interested in current social problems.*

**B**RITISH, German, or domestic propagandists can accomplish in the United States only what the pre-existing attitudes of the American population will allow, it is demonstrated by recent psychological research.

If an individual has strongly favorable attitudes toward one or more of the belligerent countries, he is not likely to be affected immediately by the propaganda of the other side. But he is ready to believe and remember propaganda from the country with which he already sympathizes.

An experiment recently performed by Prof. George W. Hartmann of Teachers College, Columbia University, and Dr. Walter Watson of Cooper Union Institute of Technology shows the limitations placed upon propaganda by the person to which it is directed.

One group of ten believers in a personal deity and one group of ten atheists were asked to read and evaluate a series of arguments for and against the existence of a personal deity. Both groups were able to recognize the most telling points of their opponents and they remembered these points better than the arguments which they considered weak. The arguments which supported an individual's point of view, however, were better retained than those which were opposed to it.

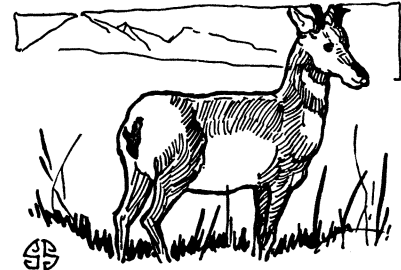
An increased acquaintanceship with an opponent's philosophy, these investigators found, had no effect upon the subject's religious outlook.

The atheists remained atheistic and the theists retained their belief in the existence of God. The two groups were no nearer together after their new experience than they were at the start.

The Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues calls attention to the fact that the beliefs which people now consider good or bad help determine what a propagandist can accomplish. This statement, the Society feels, must be emphasized at a time when the layman's growing sensitivity to the realities of propaganda during a war has led him to attribute a diabolic power to the man equipped with the techniques of mass psychology. Many persons now suspect that their most intimate opinions are being manufactured for them by others; and that they themselves would not necessarily approve of the cause to which they are being converted if the real purpose of the propagandist were revealed to them. Although the facts partly justify the fears and skepticism of the enlightened citizen, the Society also points out, there are limitations to all propaganda which lie within the individuals who are to be affected.

*Science News Letter, November 18, 1939*

About one-sixth of the Christmas trees used in the United States come from Montana.



### Geography of Songs

**T**HE LANDSCAPE in a poet's eye can be pinned down on the map, if one has a little knowledge of natural history.

That "Home on the Range," for example, tunefully longed for through millions of radio sets almost every night, must have been somewhere in central Texas, or perhaps in Oklahoma.

It figures out this way: Deer are animals of the open woods, whereas antelope favor the open, grassy plains. Therefore the range country the original minstrel was thinking about must have been in some region where there is both timber and grassland.

The edge of the foothills country from Colorado northward would fit this description as well as the timber-edge region in Texas. But the poet goes on to yearn for "a land where the bright diamond sand flows leisurely down the stream;" and streams aren't leisurely in the foothills.

Furthermore, the "range" of the song seems to be fairly remote in time. The "graceful white swan" must be either the whistling swan, which is now comparatively rare, or the trumpeter swan, which is nearly extinct. Both were at least fairly abundant in the West up until about sixty years ago, when recklessly-shooting white men invaded the region in numbers.

Not all poets give so full a description of the country of their dreams, yet sometimes even a passing phrase localizes the picture. When John Howard Payne wrote into "Home, Sweet Home" that line about "the woodbine, whose fragrance," he put his mother's imaginary cottage somewhat to the south of New York City, which was his actual home town.

There are two vines commonly called

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