

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**BRITISH, 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.

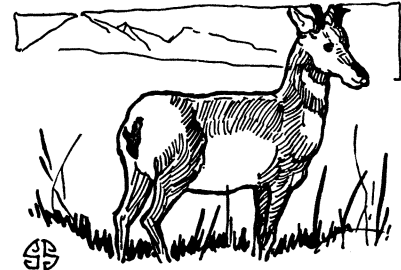
An increased acquaintanceship with an opponent's philosophy, these investigators found, had no effect upon the subject's religious outlook.

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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woodbine in the United States. One is the Virginia creeper or five-fingered ivy, which is not fragrant. The other (really the one entitled to the name) is a naturalized vine honeysuckle from the Old World, which thrives well in the South, but is hardly to be found north of central New Jersey. Payne probably got to know the vine well during a period he spent with the Chero-

kee Indians in the Southern Appalachians.

Probably the most exploited plant in present-day lyrics is cotton. It constitutes the entire vegetation of the south, especially Alabama, in the rather weird geobotany of the bards of Tin Pan Alley—for whom Dixie begins at the southern environs of Jersey City.

*Science News Letter, November 18, 1939*

## ENGINEERING

## Germany May Well Attain Adequate Aviation Fuels

**I**MPLIED warning that America must not assume eventual failure of the German air force through Allied blockade of overseas petroleum supplies appears in a report of Dr. Benjamin T. Brooks, consulting chemist and petroleum expert, to the American Chemical Society.

Statements that Germany lacks production facilities for the super gasolines, needed in swift pursuit and attack planes for greatest performance, have been common since the European war started. Dr. Brooks' analysis, one of the few yet published showing the other side of the picture, shows that:

1. Given adequate technical preparation, together with petroleum from Rumania and Russia, Germany should not be handicapped in quality or quantity of aviation fuels.

2. The catalytic process of making high-octane aviation fuels was discovered in Germany, and knowledge of the best methods can reasonably be assumed to be available there. No reliable information is available showing how far Germany has gone in this direction.

3. Germany apparently operates 20% of her air force with Diesel powered planes, thus conserving super gasolines for the fighters and fastest bombers.

4. Super fuels are not absolutely needed for long range bombing. Dr. Brooks

recalls that Lindbergh flew the Atlantic 12 years ago with gasoline of only 69 octane rating. While merits of better gasoline are many, only the war itself will show whether 100 octane gasolines are as essential as many experts have indicated.

5. By water cooling many of its planes Germany is enabled to use benzene blends for fuel, as do many racing motor cars. This permits Germany to use some 4,500,000 barrels of benzene for aviation purposes.

6. By adapting injection fuel methods, discovered in Diesel engine development, many German planes can use a wider range of octane number fuels to much greater advantage.

*Science News Letter, November 18, 1939*

## ORNITHOLOGY

## First Thanksgiving Bird Saved from Fate of Dodo

**P**RE-THANKSGIVING note: There is a good chance that the genuine original Thanksgiving turkey will not join the dodo in ornithological extinction—the wild turkey, that is. The tame, domesticated, raised-for-the-market turkey is plentiful but the wild turkey, America's largest game bird, the symbol of Thanksgiving, has been in danger of vanishing. Once common over most of the U. S. east of the Rockies in wooded areas, wild turkeys whose ancestors fed the Pilgrims of New England have been rapidly disappearing. Reason: Woods converted to farmlands and overshooting. The U. S. Bureau of Biological Survey experts are making things easy and safe for them, cooperating with state game departments and sportsmen. Wild turkeys need large areas upon which to live. Some gobblers have been known to travel 15 miles from their roosts.

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