



Pen and Sword Pt. III: 5 Questions

by Nick Milne

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[N.B. This is the third in a series of posts about the history of British propaganda efforts during the First World War -- [the inaugural post can be read here](#). The main focus of the series will be on the literary side of things, but possibly with sidelights on other related topics as necessary.]

I had said at the end of [my most recent installment](#) that *King Albert's Book* (1914), one of the most popular of the "gift books" sold to raise charitable funds during the war, would be the focus of my next post. That one is still under construction, but here's something short and sweet in the meantime.

King Albert's Book is far from being the only gift book to achieve popularity during the war; another such volume is [The Lord Kitchener Memorial Book](#), compiled and edited by [Sir Hedley Le Bas](#) with the purpose of raising money for the Lord Kitchener National Memorial Fund. The Fund's stated aim was to provide for injured servicemen, though in the years following the war its focus shifted to helping cover university fees for the children of servicemen. The book itself is very much what one might expect from a volume in this genre; it contains a panoply of fascinating documents, pictures, facsimiles and tributes, but one of its most interesting features is an extensive collection of recruiting advertisements that were run in the press. Sir Hedley, who was intimately involved in their distribution, prefaces the collection with a short essay describing how they came about. He writes of having always hoped that press advertisement could be harnessed by the Empire as a force for good on a practical level, but' well, see for yourself:

But never in my wildest moments did I visualise the possibility of the British Empire rallying great armies to the flag in the hour of bitter need, by the help of newspaper advertising, and less did I think that I, as an old soldier, as the nominal head of the Government's advertising programme, would become, in a strictly technical sense, a sort of super recruiting agent. It may not be very wonderful to people outside of Fleet Street, but I never look back on the strange situation created by the war, the need for a call upon men on an unexampled scale, and the method of making that call, without marvelling.

[. . .]

It is often said there is nothing new under the sun, and certainly 'advertising for an army' was not a new idea. Strange as it may sound, here in England we were advertising for an army one hundred years ago. I have before me an old proclamation addressed [?To the warriors of Manchester.?](#) The advertisement, a quaint specimen of early publicity, was inspired by much the same conditions that set England advertising for an army in 1914. The announcement refers to 'these times of common danger' and to the 'ruthless plunderer of nations.?' A hundred years ago Europe was passing through the ordeal of battle with which we, in 1916, have grown sadly too familiar, and England was resisting a 'ruthless plunderer of nations' ' not the Wilhelm who will always be associated with many bitter memories, but a much worthier foe ' the great Napoleon.

Doubtless, the old advertisement, quaintly worded as it is, produced the desired end, which was to raise an army for Gibraltar. One smiles at the quaintly moving appeal of this hundred year old advertisement.

The sentence with which I've chosen to conclude the above transcription will hopefully occasion similar smiles.

Sir Hedley is clear about what was at stake, and so attempts to justify the sometimes (from a modern perspective) extravagant rhetorical lengths to which recruitment advertisements went in those years of peril. 'The problem before the Government,' he writes, 'not as a shy experiment but as a dire necessity, was to raise an entire army on a scale that made the country gasp when Lord Kitchener first outlined it.?'

It was with this end in mind that advertisements like the following were printed:

I believe most of it should be legible enough, but the rhetorical turn at the end deserves to be repeated:

?A great responsibility rests on you. Will you sacrifice your personal convenience for your Country's need? Ask your men to enlist TO-DAY.?

Many of the advertisements issued during this campaign embraced this 'some questions for X' format; most of them were directed at the men likely to volunteer, but some ' like the one above and [like this one](#) directed at the 'Young Women of London' ' were instead directed at those in a position to exert their personal influence on potential recruits. [Sir Hedley was convinced](#) that these posters had been the most effective of all his creations over the course of the war. The scope and nature of influence that the above advertisements suggest make them a fascinating point of insight into British war culture.

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