

# A SHELF OF RECENT BOOKS

## THREE STATESMEN ON THE WAR

By Charles Seymour

WITH few exceptions, prominent statesmen on the Allied side have thus far refrained from writing war books. Now we have three who not merely played an important rôle in the war, but who are also very distinguished authors. Viviani is a former prime minister of France and one of the chiefs of the war mission of 1917; what is of greater importance in the present connection, perhaps, he is a historian of some repute. Nitti is a former premier of Italy, and also a first rate economist. Everyone knows the scintillations of Winston Churchill's political career, although some may not remember that he is the author of a really admirable political biography as well as of notable if rather journalistic historical studies of the Boer War. The three books under consideration all deal with the world war, although they emphasize different aspects. Viviani treats of German responsibility and chiefly of the crisis of 1914. Nitti is concerned with the peace and especially with what he regards as French responsibility for existing European chaos.

Churchill devotes a third of his book to political and naval problems of Great Britain before the war, two chapters to the crisis of 1914, and the remainder to the conduct of the navy through the spring of 1915.

Both Viviani and Nitti have plenty of critical sense when they care to exercise it, but their attitude in these books is so far from the judicial that it is fair to call the volumes political pamphlets. Nitti is so thoroughly convinced of the stupidity and cruelty of the Versailles Treaty and of the imperialistic designs of contemporary France, that he marshals facts and arguments merely to win his readers to this point of view. His analysis of the Treaty, covering 150 pages, interprets the settlement as a colossal example of faithlessness and cynicism on the part of the Allies. "The victors have kept none of the promises which they made in the hour of danger, but have, on the other hand, belied the principles of freedom, democracy, and self-determination of peoples which they pretend to hold." To this alleged faithlessness the author attributes the economic and political chaos which he describes in the following hundred pages. He concludes with a demand for a complete reconstruction, which in his opinion can be accomplished

only through the economic and moral pressure of America. It is unfortunate that the solid economic sense of Signor Nitti should be blurred by the inaccuracy of such political generalizations as that quoted, and frequently should disappear completely in the flood of invective which he directs against France. A surprising disregard for the sentimental factor in politics, combined with not infrequent errors of fact, robs many of his most effective arguments of any conclusiveness.

M. Viviani plans to show, by the recently published Austrian and German documents, the extent of German responsibility for the war. Much of his book is a rehash. The chapters in which he describes his experiences and impressions during July and August, 1914, have the value that belongs to the autobiography of an important participant in great events. But his analysis of the Kautsky documents and the Austrian Red Book betrays the qualities of a partizan. Emotion is frequently substituted for scientific criticism, and inevitably confuses the vital issues. By refusing to admit the anxiety of many German officials to preserve the peace, and by attempting to convict the Kaiser and Bethmann of something more than stupidity and weakness (are not these the unforgivable sins in executives?), he lifts some of the responsibility from the shoulders of those who may fairly be regarded as the real criminals—the military and naval leaders in Austria and Germany. As in Nitti's book, the eye and the brain of the reader are distracted by misprints in proper names and dates.

Not merely in interest but in historical value Churchill's book is by far the most important of the three. It is largely autobiographical, and, as we

might imagine, the dramatic quality of the events in which the author was concerned loses nothing in his exposition. He is able to impart a touch of romance to the technical details of naval design, and when he comes to the chase of the "Goeben" and "Breslau", the battle off the Falklands, the attempt to intercept the German cruisers on their return from the bombardment of Hartlepool and Scarborough, the reader's thrills are genuine. His book has naturally the qualities of special pleading for the preparations of the Admiralty and the accomplishments of the navy during the first ten months of fighting. But there is ample evidence of studied fairness in the treatment of controversial issues. Not merely is much new material presented, but where Mr. Churchill covers the same tracks previously traversed by the "Official History" he has done much to clarify and popularize the technicalities of Sir Julian Corbett. A following volume is promised.

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As We See It. By Rene Viviani, translated by Thomas R. Ybarra. Harper and Bros.

The Decadence of Europe, The Paths of Reconstruction. By Francesco Nitti, translated by F. Brittain. Henry Holt and Co.

The World Crisis. By the Rt. Hon. Winston S. Churchill. Charles Scribner's Sons.