

PROPAGANDA



*"They stemmed the first mad onrush
Of the cultured German Hun,
Who'd outraged every female Belgian
And maimed every mother's son."*

Unknown Poet, A Medley of Song, 1928

The very fact that Germany had invaded 'Poor little Belgium' and France in August 1914, forfeited the moral high ground it had hoped to secure through its own pre-war propaganda. This allowed the British propagandists to justify going to war to the men they now required to enlist 'For King and Country'.

The British campaign was further aided by several spectacular German mistakes. Their best known being the sinking of the Lusitania in 1915, the Zimmermann Telegram in 1917 and the case of Nurse Edith Cavell, executed in 1915. Cavell was presented as an 'angel of mercy' whose tragic murder was set against the background of Belgian violation.

Atrocity stories, as ever, helped to sustain the moral condemnation of the enemy. The British stereotype of the 'Hun' provided the essential focus; representing a German society based upon militarist values, busily crucifying soldiers, violating women, and mutilating babies. Perhaps the most infamous atrocity story of the war concerned the alleged German 'Corpse-Conversion Factory,' boiling down human corpses to make war commodities. When the British Foreign Secretary, A. J. Balfour, studied the 'evidence' surrounding this story, he agreed that it was inconclusive but added that "there does not, in view of the many atrocious actions of which the Germans have been guilty, appear to be any reason why it should not be true."