

# THE LITERARY DIGEST

May, 1917

## WAKE UP, ARTISTS!

**A**RTISTS MAY RENDER FIRST AID to recruiting by submitting suitable designs for posters. This is one feature of preparedness that is complained of for its inadequacy. Some artists who might design suitable and compelling calls to the colors, especially for marine recruiting, it is perhaps facetiously declared, are spending their time lecturing on the shortcomings of the Navy. Complaint is generally made that the old-time posters suitable for peace-conditions are not effective enough for the present crisis. In the *Boston Transcript*, Mr. Truman Coss sets forth this state of affairs, written, it must be added, before "Wake up, America" day (April 19), whose results are already known:

"Publicity officers of the Navy-recruiting divisions find themselves lacking in designs for effective posters. They have received from Canada, France, Britain, and Russia examples of posters which aided recruiting in these countries for the military or hospital arms. Of these the French are the most attractive—yet those of Russia bear marks, too, of having been done with artistic design. Our Army and Navy posters 'did well enough for peace,' the officers say, 'but are not suited to a call to war, and the designs that have been submitted by artists do not "register."' One brought in this week showed a sailor waving a cutlas with his left hand! The Government has been willing to pay for effective designs, but painters of Navy subjects have been preoccupied with lecturing on the Navy's imperfections. At this time they have a chance to translate their patriotism into poster-designs which will inspire interest in naval service. The best so far is a design by James Montgomery Flagg, showing Uncle Sam pointing a finger and saying, 'I Want You,' which was made for a magazine. Reuter Dahl recently agreed to submit a design. Once the artists are reminded of the lack of poster-designs there is no doubt they will be equal to the emergency and to the several appealing phrases of the President's speech. To have one's free design accepted by the Government ought to be worth striving for.

"This will be the greatest week the Navy has ever known for fast recruiting—far outdoing the enthusiasm of the Spanish War; but a few more speeds need to be let out everywhere to obtain the quotas required by April 20."

The situation of our Army-posters is covered by "A Keenly Interested Observer" who writes to the *New York Tribune*. He finds "most of the posters used are old and ill-adapted to the present purpose; that some are tainted by commercialism, and that, in point of artistic quality and psychological appeal, our posters are inferior to the best products of Canada—particularly of French Canada—and of England, and far inferior to those

## *The James Flagg Poster*

splendid posters—full of ideas, of imagination, of beauty—which have been the natural flowering of the spirit of France.” He gives an instance:

“For example, one of the most inspiring of our posters represents a marine, suitcase in hand, taking long strides away from his vessel, as who should say, ‘Come on in! Shore-leave’s fine!’ Again, one of the worst, which, I am glad to say, did not bear the *imprimatur* of the Government (tho presumably it did have the Government’s *imprimi potest*), bore at the top the name of a New York newspaper, together with an advertisement of the same; below appeared two figures evidently intended to represent the Army and the Navy, respectively. Looking at the badly drawn and repellent Army man, a prospective recruit might be pardoned for saying, ‘Me for the Navy!’—until he saw the badly drawn and equally repellent marine. Possibly these unattractive figures were intended to represent that supposititious sort of American soldier said to be ‘always ready to fight on American soil’—and in Mexico.

“On inquiry made at Army-recruiting headquarters it was learned that designs for posters will be eagerly welcomed by Colonel Walsh, the officer in charge. The same hearty democratic spirit doubtless prevails at the headquarters for the Navy.

“Here, then, is an opportunity for artists, advertising men, art students, and also some hundreds of boys and girls in the poster-making classes of the high schools to do their bit. The distinctive

American poster for purposes of recruiting in the present war has not yet been evolved. To attempt to produce it would be an enterprise eminently worth while and rewarding. Even if our eager young men might enlist in sufficient numbers without more effectual posters, it should be a matter of pride to make such posters as we do use worthy of the country and of the cause.”

On April 17, the “Illustrators” got as far as a “war-dinner” and heard a plea from Mr. George Creel, the new chairman of the Press Censorship Committee, for pictures for the cause. Such enthusiasm as the evening called forth should result in stirring pictorialism. One guest had the misfortune to say that six months ago none of the nations—France, England, Russia—knew what they were fighting about, until the United States came in “and lifted the war to the level of a crusade—a fight for democracy.” The speaker following was Cass Gilbert, designer of the Custom-House and other notable buildings, including the Woolworth. Then Mr. Gilbert “told of the glories that are France and the grandeur that is Britain. And the artists, which included many artists of literature also, got up on their hind legs and yelled their collective heads off.”