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‘A universal collection of literature on the European war’? State Library Victoria’s Great War pamphlets

‘the finest library, not only in Australia, but ...
in the Southern Hemisphere’

[We] celebrate ... a red-letter day in the annals of Victoria, another milestone on the road of intellectual progress. (Applause.) [This] building ... would help to raise Melbourne as high in culture and art as it had already reached in the more material affairs of commerce and wealth. (Applause.)

Henry Gyles Turner, President of the Trustees of the Public Library, Museums and National Gallery of Victoria, 14 November 1913.¹

The magnificent domed reading room of the Melbourne Public Library inspired by those of the British Museum and the US Library of Congress, was less than a year old when war broke out in Europe in August 1914. The Library then housed some 263,000 volumes, 15,000 pamphlets and 45,000 newspaper and periodical files. These riches, which each year attracted 400,000 visitors to the 470 seats of the reference and newspaper rooms, made the Library (with the adjoining Museums and National Gallery) a major educational and cultural institution.² Victoria’s governor had laid the foundation stone, but it was Australia’s governor-general who opened ‘the finest library, not only in Australia, but ... in the Southern Hemisphere’.³ The Great War soon transformed Melbourne from a state capital and temporary home of the Federal parliament into a truly national and Dominion capital, the epicentre

of Australia's military effort,⁴ and Victoria's Public Library became the de facto national library. In 1913 the trustees judged the new building fit to house, in 50 years time, an anticipated two million books.⁵ The Great War, at base a struggle between Britain and Germany for industrial and trade supremacy, had a huge impact on the library, significantly skewing acquisitions policy and the nature of the collection and, in the long term, fuelling an Australian cycle of boom, bust and war, that would dramatically change national priorities.

In 1914 the venerable octogenarian banker-cum-historian Henry Gyles Turner presided over 17 wartime trustees – middle-aged to elderly males who were part of Melbourne's business, professional, religious and literary establishment. Several of them were rabid Imperial loyalists and fiercely anti-German, and some were to lose sons in the war. Turner sized up the challenges and opportunities that the European war posed for the library: 'The 18th century was a time of almost incessant war,' he later reflected in a public lecture:

but it added much to our literature, which we would not willingly let die. The close of the Napoleonic wars saw a great outburst of martial enthusiasm. During the 50 years after Waterloo, 300 important books, dealing exclusively with military and naval history and biography, were published.⁶ Such works were the standard reading of our grandfathers.

To discharge their responsibility to the current generation 'The Library trustees ... decided to secure all the books bearing on the [Great W]ar.'⁷ Chief Librarian Edmund La Touche Armstrong, recalling in 1932 the decision taken in 1915, wrote: 'The Trustees decided to obtain through Messrs. Sotheran and Co. a universal collection of literature on the European war.'⁸ By 'all' or 'universal' the trustees presumably meant all-embracing or, at least, comprehensive; 'literature' suggested that the collection would include more than books. But in 1915 it did not seem that this could be easily or readily accomplished, for war severely disrupted the supply of overseas publications.⁹ The recent surge in world publishing – 10,000 to 12,000 new titles each year in Great Britain, 14,000 in the United States, and 20,000 in Germany – was meaningless if there was no shipping available to bring them to Australia.¹⁰ With books, pamphlets and periodicals in short supply, there was yet the newspaper. The hours of the Newspapers Room were extended into the evening, and duplicate copies of the papers were provided.¹¹

In addition to shipping issues, there was the emerging popular antagonism to all things German. This was a dramatic reversal of attitudes. Melbourne's German community had flourished quite remarkably in the second half of

the 19th century;¹² indeed the German contribution to 19th-century Australia had been 'out of all proportion to the number of Germans in the population as a whole'.¹³ But British-Australian respect came to an abrupt halt with the war. The blow, as the pioneer historian of Germans in Australia wrote in 1932, was such that Australia's German communities were unlikely to recover.¹⁴ Reflecting this heritage, and the respect for German culture and learning, the Library had a substantial collection of German literature. The trustees' passion for this did not quickly abate.¹⁵ One trustee, the Rev Dr WH Fitchett, author of the bestselling *Deeds that Made the Empire*, caught the 1914 Christmas market with a substantial pamphlet 'The first three months of the war', in which he enjoined readers to distinguish between the Prussian military caste responsible for the war and the great mass of peaceable Germans: 'Germany is still the land of Luther and of the Reformation, and the world is still its debtor in many realms.'¹⁶ And, in their annual report for 1914, the trustees lamented that 'Nothing has been obtained from Germany since the outbreak of the war, and the publication of many French and other periodicals has been stopped or seriously interrupted'.¹⁷ Given developing Australian paranoia about Germany and 'the enemy within', and a war dragging on to an uncertain outcome, how long would the trustees' and librarians' rational and professional standards prevail in a society rapidly succumbing to jingoism? In October 1915, when the daughter of a Mr H Welter applied to the trustees for the 'payment of [the] amount due to her father' (it is not clear what this was about), the words 'German subject' were added to the minutes, and their decision was recorded as 'Declined' and 'No action'.¹⁸

'records of the war will, doubtless, be one of the largest [sections] in the Library'

The trustees' March 1915 decision to accept the 'Offer by Sotheran & to supply books etc. respecting the war' was minuted: 'To be written to – for a good collection.'¹⁹ For the convenience of readers, the *Argus* reported, this special collection of works would be kept together in the Inquiry Room (which meant the catalogue room), obviating any need to consult the catalogue: 'About 100 volumes have already been obtained, and nearly three times this number are already on order.'²⁰ At the end of the year Henry Gyles Turner wrote that the trustees 'have already obtained several hundred volumes and pamphlets' and predicted that 'the section devoted to the records of the war will, doubtless, be one of the largest in the Library'.²¹ Edmund La Touche Armstrong then estimated this collection to comprise 'about 500 volumes and very many pamphlets'.²² In 1916 the Great War collection was specially

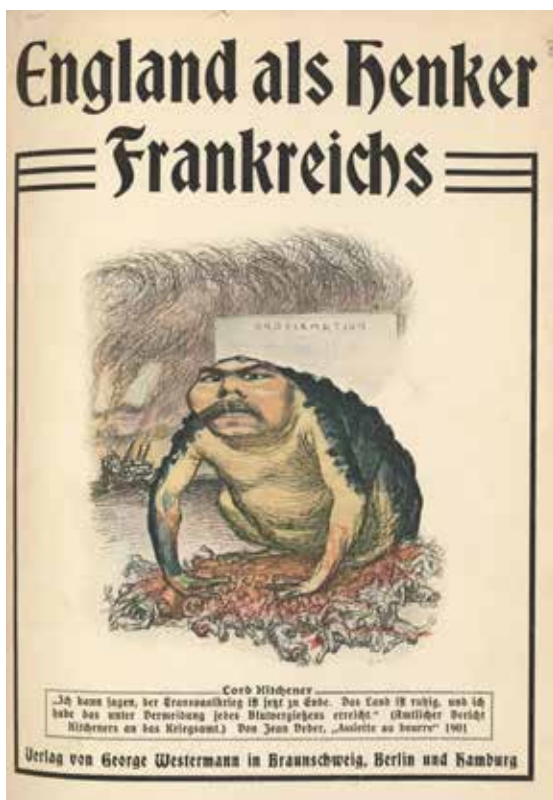
classified and librarians were assisting visitors engaged on 'research work'.²³ By 1917 what seems to have become defined as a core selection in the Inquiry Room amounted to 'considerably over five hundred' volumes.²⁴

That the Library was able to build such a sizable Great War collection was due to one of the oldest book supplying companies in Europe. The Library had been dealing with Sotheran & Co. since 1856.²⁵ Established in the 18th century and surviving in various reinvented forms, Sotheran's was by 1914 a large and successful company that had received Royal Warrants, most recently from King George V. Judging that the business in rare and valuable books would decline in wartime, Henry Cecil Sotheran moved his business from the high end of the market to general bookselling. He did well from supplying library orders, especially from overseas.²⁶

The majority of works then coming into the Library, other than by donation, copyright deposit, or from government, were supplied by George Robertson of Melbourne, and this continued to be the case. Robertson invoiced for £1826 (or 43 per cent) of acquisitions costing £4253 in 1916, and for almost half of £3834 spent in 1917. But Robertson and other suppliers had to make room for the entrance of Sotheran's onto the market. On 12 November 1915 a single entry under Sotheran's listed 111 war books in one lot, beginning a pattern of large lots that continued to arrive every few months. Sotheran's invoiced the Library for books and pamphlets worth £383 in 1916, £382 in 1917, and £471 in 1918, around 9–10 per cent of the total cost of acquisitions. We shall see that, for this modest outlay (about £100 of which was for pamphlets), the Library considerably augmented its collections.²⁷

In May 1917 President Turner observed that, despite a great falling off in the general output of books due to the scarcity and expense of paper, the Library had obtained 3000 books bearing on the war, including some in French, Italian and German.²⁸ Those 3000 books constituted one in seven (or about 14 per cent) of all the 21,000 books acquired by the library in the first three years of the war.²⁹ Sotheran's supplied about 1400 hard cover war monographs in 1915–18, which was clearly a substantial proportion of the Library's total.

Library acquisitions of pamphlets rose dramatically over 1914–18, from 1048 in 1914 (17 per cent of the period total), to 1191 in 1915 (19 per cent), and 2280 in 1916 (37 per cent), before falling to 911 in 1917 (14.5 per cent) and 778 in 1918 (12.5 per cent), for a total of 6208 over those four years.³⁰ This explosion of the pamphlet holdings from a base of 14,086 at the beginning of 1914 (that is, by 44 per cent) was driven by the rise in war pamphlet publication, Library enthusiasm, and Sotheran's ability to supply. Acquisitions from Sotheran's amounted to 171 (14 per cent) of the Library's pamphlets in



Left: The cover of *England als Henker Frankreichs* (England as France's Executioner), by Walther Unus, was illustrated with this brutal 1901 image of Lord Kitchener, by the French artist Jean Veber.

Right: *Die Deutsche Flagge im Stillen Ozean* (The German Flag in the Pacific Ocean), by Max von Grapow, a German admiral with intimate knowledge of the Pacific.

1915, 1453 (64 per cent) in 1916, 245 (27 per cent) in 1917, and 110 (14 per cent) in 1918, a total of 1979 between 1915 and 1918, accounting for 38 per cent of the pamphlets that the Library acquired in those years. More than a third of all pamphlets dealt with the Great War.

Great War pamphlets can be found in at least five collections – those designated as the War, European History, Oxford, Political Economy, and European War collections. The last of these was created, perhaps, when the 'European crisis' of the northern autumn became a war, but before it became better known as the 'Great War'. The earlier collection of War pamphlets contains material from the early 1800s to the 1950s, and includes mainly (but not only, see below) technical manuals and guidebooks relating to Great War weaponry, army and naval forces, and training. The Oxford War pamphlets were issued and catalogued in volumes, individual copies (duplicates, essentially) being included with the European War pamphlets. A few war-related pamphlets are to be found in the (also older) Political Economy series, and rather fewer in the European History pamphlets.³¹

As with the totals of monographs dealing with the Great War, it is difficult to be precise about the numbers of war pamphlets that were ever held by the Library, because definitions hinge on the subject categorisation both in the card catalogue and of the substantially card-catalogue derived computer-based catalogue.³² Of the 2514 pamphlets in the 360-volume European War collection, some 2252 were issued 1914–18.³³ Adding some 161 folio European War pamphlets,³⁴ 86 Oxford War pamphlets 1915–16, and 211 from the War Pamphlets,³⁵ gives us a fair stab at a Library total of 2710. In supplying 1979 of these, Sotheran's clearly played a major role in shaping the Library's Great War pamphlet collection, and the predominant role in forming the collection known as the European War pamphlets.

The European War pamphlets were bound into volumes from early 1918 and by 1925 some 289 volumes had been completed, comprising 2041 items.³⁶ The remaining 470 items were boxed loosely as 71 'volumes' up to Volume 360. By 1925, the year that Edmund La Touche Armstrong retired, the European War pamphlets comprised the Library's largest collection of bound pamphlets, having outpaced older collections such as Bibliography, Law, Medicine, Political Economy, and even the general War collection.

Pamphlets cost more to bind than purchase, so the binding blitz on the European War pamphlets from early 1918 suggests an attempt to protect a valued collection of fragile items from the ravages of handling. That this initiative petered out in the 1920s, and ceased in 1925, suggests either declining reader demand or budgetary restraints, or both. It is not clear how accessible pamphlets were to the public during the war or, indeed, whether they were available at all.³⁷ As distinct from 'volumes', presumably hard-bound books, no mention was made of the paper-covered pamphlets as being openly accessible from the Inquiry Room. Perhaps, before binding as volumes, they had to be requested individually, which would have given the Library some control over the collection.

Was there any Library sensitivity to the circulation of German pamphlets, either in German or in translation? Every pamphlet received by the Library was registered and given a unique number. Some are noted as 'withdrawn', either because they were reclassified as a 'volume' (that is, a separate monograph), or were duplicates. The reasons in other cases are not clear. All Melbourne Catholic Truth Society tracts were withdrawn, as were a number of technical pamphlets, and a range of imprints dealing in 1915 with the natural resources of the Dominions and Allies, such as the United States (as potentially 'aiding the enemy?'). About 22 Sotheran-supplied items were withdrawn in 1915–18, and some eight pamphlets supplied by the Premier's Office, for

reasons that also remain unclear. Overall only about 33 war-related pamphlets were withdrawn,³⁸ and only a few of these were in German.

Given the suppression of German-language newspapers under the *War Precautions Act 1914*, and the prohibition of the use of German in Lutheran schools, it would be surprising if pamphlets (and war books) in German were available to readers during the war. Had members of Melbourne's German community been willing to request them, and if they were, how were their requests received? Some clues to Library attitudes and to the control exercised over the broader war literature collection are yielded by contemporary comments on war monographs.

'Britain never entered into a war with more righteous justification or with a more entire absence of national aggrandisement'

When reporting in May 1915 their decision to keep war literature in the Inquiry Room, the trustees added this comment:

The works are necessarily of varying importance, as they are written for different classes of readers. Works closely connected with the war, such as Bernhardt's 'Germany and the Next War' [1912], 'Treitschke's Life and Works' [1914], Stephen Graham's 'Russia and the World' [1915] and Usher's 'Pan-Germanism' [1913] will also be kept in this section for a time.³⁹

The provision of such books documenting the philosophical, political and military underpinnings of Germany's alleged drive to world domination can hardly be said to have offered a dispassionate context for the study of the war. Rather, the selection of these titles appears like an attempt to frame readers' approach in conventional, even patriotic, terms. In November 1917 an *Argus* feature writer commented pointedly that the considerably more than 500 volumes available in the Inquiry Room constituted:

only a small part of the literature [the reader] wishes to see. For all those dealing with ethical, religious, and philosophical aspects of the war are absent. In this room in the Library are military, historical, and political works, with a few scientific essays, and that is all.

The writer betrayed his sympathies when he recommended, to those wanting books that explained rather than merely described the war, six books published since 1912. They dealt with the prewar growth of antagonism between Britain and Germany, the German craving for expansion at Britain's expense, the inevitability of the two nations' death struggle, the contrast between German '*kultur*' and British idealism, the German misunderstanding

and misapplication of Darwinism, and the war as vital to the survival of Christianity.⁴⁰ One wonders whether the trustees, or the librarians, had withdrawn such texts from the Inquiry Room as superfluous to the needs of readers whom they judged, after several years of war, to need no further convincing of Germany perfidy?

Certainly President Turner's own reading⁴¹ had left him in no doubt about German responsibility for the war. When he lectured on 'The War', just a fortnight before the British initiated the battle of the Somme in mid-1916, he stated that:

after a most careful study of [the war's] genesis, in white, green, yellow, and blue books, in official documents, in private letters, and public papers, I am convinced that Britain never entered into a war with more righteous justification or with a more entire absence of national aggrandisement. Every effort was made up to the last moment to avert the outbreak, even to the very verge of entreaty, such as it is almost humiliating to look back upon, now that we know how fixed was the determination of the chief *provocateur* to seize what he believed to be an exceptionally favorable opportunity.⁴²

Most of Turner's lecture was concerned with left-wing threats to the war effort and postwar harmony.

The Library's public commitment to the cause of King and Country, Empire and Allies, strengthened as the war lengthened. All of the winter lecture series for 1916, 1917 and 1918 were devoted to the war, with four trustees delivering seven of the 17 lectures. In 1916 the trustees, endorsing French Week ('regardless of the risk of precedent', the *Age* commented), 'sanctioned the decoration of the statue of Joan of Arc with a laurel wreath, a tricolour, and the inscription "A la gloire des armes Françaises"'.⁴³ In May 1917, posters extolling the qualities of the French soldier were hung at the Library entrance⁴⁴ and, in July, celebrations of the French national day again commenced at the statue and were even more elaborate, with shields bearing the Union Jack, the Australian ensign and the tricolour attached to the Library columns, speeches (including one from conscription enthusiast Sir William Irvine, emphasising Australia's indebtedness, no less, to France's conscript army) delivered from a dais, and a military band.⁴⁵ In February 1917 the Library was closed during the 'Win-the-War' rally staged in the city by supporters of the new national Labor-Liberal 'Win-the-War' federal ministry, which was formed in the wake of the Labor party split over conscription.⁴⁶

In the same month the trustees accepted 'with pleasure' an offer of 'a replica of the German "Lusitania" Medal' and also George Swinburne's gift of

a set of the papers distributed among Australian soldiers at the front during the recent conscription referendum, 'so far as is known ... the first set ... which has come into the possession of a public institution in Australia'.⁴⁷ And that year a further volume of Louis Raemaeker's venomously anti-German cartoons was ranked among noteworthy acquisitions that included a 46-volume edition of Voltaire's *Oeuvres* (the gift of President Turner), and an autographed letter written on board the *Victory* by Lord Nelson. In August 1918 the trustees joined a deputation of some 50 patriotic organisations that urged Acting Prime Minister William Watt to conduct an extensive propaganda campaign to emphasise the Empire's noble war aims, combat disloyal elements, and arouse enthusiasm afresh for the war.⁴⁸ In an Australia bitterly divided over the sacrifices and conduct of the war, the trustees had shown their hand.

The great pamphlet war of 1914-18

Most of the European War pamphlets in the Library's collection have now been digitised. Although easy to access online, the size of the collection remains daunting, and its main features and qualities are elusive to the average reader, who is likely to come across individual titles by pure serendipity. What are the collection's main features and qualities?

The Library's war pamphlets need to be appreciated as part of a wartime publishing phenomenon. The war, while pre-eminently one of men and guns, quickly became also a war of words, of slogans, of claims and counterclaims. The millions of words spoken and heard, written, printed and read made the conflict a war of information – and of misinformation. Indeed, some observers came to believe that in 1914–18 the propagandists' pens proved mightier – more decisive to the outcome – than the warriors' swords. A considerable amount of the publishing generated by the war seems to have taken the form of pamphlets. The historical precedents for this were strong. Throughout modern history, domestic and global crises, notably the English Civil War and the American and French revolutions, generated an upsurge in the publication of pamphlets.⁴⁹ Rival factions argued their causes in what we might term 'pamphlet wars'. The higher the stakes and the more perilous the fortunes of the participants, the greater the pamphlet war raged. The Great War was no exception.

The heydays (or hey-years) of the war pamphlet were 1914, 1915 and 1916. Pamphlets were easily produced, topical and cheap. That the Library's pamphlet acquisitions from Sotheran's cost less than £100 indicates it was an inexpensive way (before the cost of binding was factored in) for the trustees to realise the ambitious scope of their war literature collecting plan. About half the Library's European War pamphlets published in 1914–18 were issued

in 1915, 18 per cent in 1914, 15 per cent in 1916, declining to 11 per cent in 1917, and 6 per cent in 1918.⁵⁰ Because of the time lag, most of those supplied by Sotheran's arrived in 1915–16. The peak and decline probably reflected changes in publication practices, including the move to more ephemeral types of propaganda – handbills, leaflets and the like – as the war progressed, rather than a reduction in Library collection policy. In the last, most desperate, years of the war, if official British propaganda is any guide, the emphasis moved decidedly from pamphlets to leaflets (single-page folds), postcards and film. The only way of checking this would be to mount a comparative study between State Library Victoria collections and those held by another major library.

We can quantify the war pamphlets (and books) that Sotheran's supplied, but what can be said of the quality? What were the Library's instructions to Sotheran's? What principles of selection were employed? Unfortunately, the trustees' precise remit to Sotheran's is not easily established, for the Library's correspondence (in the custody of the Public Record Office Victoria) is insufficiently organised for research, and Sotheran's archives were destroyed in the Blitz of World War II.⁵¹ Selection appears to have been out of the trustees' hands. What, then, motivated, or guided Sotheran's? The firm's proprietor, Henry Sotheran, was a passionate British patriot, aroused so much by books exposing Germany's imperialistic designs that he erected posters on his shopfront advising passers-by of the 'THREE GOOD BOOKS' and the 'THREE BAD BOOKS' (by English and German writers, respectively) they should read.⁵² Early in 1917 Sotheran's gave one room – The War Room – entirely over to war literature, and the proprietor's prejudices did not prevent his firm from seeking and supplying publications issued in the enemy camp. How Sotheran's (and the Library, for that matter) evaded 'trading with the enemy' legislation in acquiring literature sourced from Germany is unknown.⁵³

One approach to the issue of quality would be to benchmark the Sotheran-derived war pamphlets against those of another client, such as the University of Chicago Library, which gave Sotheran's 'a blank order for everything new that was published on the War'.⁵⁴ This approach has not been possible for this preliminary study. We have commenced, however, a subject analysis of the European war pamphlets, and have compared them with the *Confidential. Schedule of Wellington House Literature*, Wellington House being the secret and major propaganda arm of the British Government in the early years of the war.⁵⁵ This research work is in progress. The following broad descriptions of the State Library collection provide a basis for further work.

The variety of languages is striking: 50 per cent are in English, 25 per cent in German, 10 per cent in French, 4 per cent in Dutch, 3 per cent in Swedish

and Italian, with smaller percentages in Danish, Spanish and Portuguese, or a variety of languages (described as 'multi-language'). A few are in Latin, Norwegian or Polish. The Pamphlet Accession Books make it clear that Sotheran's supplied large numbers of German-language pamphlets, with several batches that arrived in 1916 being almost exclusively German. By engaging Sotheran's, the trustees were successful in obtaining a significant number of pamphlets in German, in fact more than 650. We do not know how Sotheran's managed this.⁵⁶

Every book and pamphlet collection is in some sense unique in that it can only be a selection of the whole. Do the Library's non-Victorian war pamphlet holdings have any special quality? An analysis of a 5 per cent sample of pamphlet holdings on Trove suggests that more than three quarters (76 per cent) was held only by State Library Victoria in Australia. Of foreign language titles, less than one-third (31.5 per cent) could be found on COPAC (the UK Union catalogue). These figures strongly suggest, at least by standards of Australian and UK library holdings, the strong research significance of the State Library pamphlet collection.⁵⁷

Half of the pamphlets are in English. Of these, three-quarters (920) were published in Great Britain, 8 per cent (96) in the United States, and the remainder mainly in British Dominions and territories. Thirty-two pamphlets in English were published on the Continent, mainly in France and Belgium, but eight in Germany and one in Turkey. Some 137 published in Australia found their way to the Library as legal deposit copies of works issued in Victoria, or as donations from private persons and state governments, or were acquired from local suppliers, mainly in Melbourne. More than half of the Australian items are Victorian publications. A considerable proportion of pamphlets from the other Dominions and the United States are government publications.

Mainstream commercial publishers account for most of the pamphlets published in Great Britain. Publishers were encouraged by silent government subsidies, though neither party ever revealed this relationship. While the Library acquired most of the monographs subsidised by Wellington House, only a minority of Wellington House pamphlets are to be found in the Library's collection, so they form only a minor part of it. Of course, suppliers such as Sotheran's would not have known of the sponsorship deal between publishers and the British Government. Does this affect the collection significantly? One's general impression is that there is little difference in tone between 'disguised official' propaganda and unofficial efforts at persuasion. Wartime censorship was the iron fist in propaganda's velvet glove, and very little was

published in belligerent countries that might have impeded the military effort or undermined civilian morale.

The range of subjects is considerable: reprints of ministerial announcements, speeches and inquiries; justifications of Britain's declaration of war and of her continued participation; accounts of enemy atrocities committed (allegedly) in Belgium, France and Armenia; accounts of battles and campaigns; and reports of men and women engaged in war work (coalmining, munitions) and personal experiences at the front. Many pamphlets are appeals to the people and government of neutral nations to join the Allies. Attacks on German war-mindedness and German perfidy are common, and pamphlets dealing with German (and Turkish) war atrocities comprise the largest category. Many of these recycle the evidence (later mostly discredited) of Lord Bryce's Commission into German atrocities in Belgium and France, and of the similarly motivated Belgian and French commissions.

There are also pamphlets dealing, more reliably, with the deportations of Belgian workers and industrial plants to Germany, subjects that have been well documented by modern historians. It is perhaps significant that there does not appear in the Library's collection the most lurid of official British propaganda pamphlets, 'A German corpse factory', which was authorised by the head of Wellington House and falsely circulated a rumour that the German army was recycling soldiers' bodies for nefarious purposes. Some of the 'outrage' and 'atrocities' pamphlets have arresting covers. Almost all the British pamphlets might reasonably be termed propagandist, a word that originated with and was made pejorative by the war, drawing on a style of writing intended to convert or persuade that was far older than 1914. The major opposition to the war in Britain came from the Independent Labour Party and the Union for Democratic Control (UDC). The publications of both bodies are well represented, but one wonders why the UDC pamphlets are to be found among the technical Great War pamphlets in the War pamphlets series rather than with the European War pamphlets.⁵⁸

German-language pamphlets constitute one quarter of European War pamphlets. Almost to a man and woman, British writers were enlisted or volunteered to write for Britain's cause.⁵⁹ There was a similar enthusiasm in Germany. 'It was not only the poets who leapt into action at the start of the war', a German historian noted, 'but almost all who could speak or write'.⁶⁰ The German-language pamphlets allow us to hear their voices, each pamphlet revealing an individual voice concerned to interpret and to understand what was happening at the time, be it a philosopher and historian such as Erich Kahler in 1914,⁶¹ a sociologist like Ferdinand Tönnies,



Louis Raemaeker's anti-German cartoons were issued by the British in this cheap pamphlet form in 1916, and distributed in 18 languages. Left, the cover shows German indifference to the treatment of Belgian women and children. Right, 'We despatch them in bundles of four': Raemaeker's endorses the rumour that Germany was extracting fat from German battlefield corpses for domestic and military use.

with two of his pamphlets appearing in 1915,⁶² or a naval man, Max von Grapow, writing in 1916 to inform fellow Germans of German activities in the Pacific.⁶³

Dipping into the German-language war pamphlets now, a century or more after each was written, one can sense – however faintly or misguidedly – idealism, humanism and a belief in German destiny. Each voice is unique, yet common threads emerge, including an underlying world view that is still evident in Stefan Zweig's *World of Yesterday* (1942), expressing a yearning for a cosmopolitan prewar Austria-Hungary.⁶⁴ The German-language war pamphlets are mostly from the early years of the war, when idealism, however naively, was possibly most deep. Also included is Ferdinand Tönnies 1919 pamphlet, written in English and published in Amsterdam,⁶⁵ which presented a view of the war as generated by Teutonic-Slavic rivalry. Another, by Oswald Spengler in 1921, claimed that German humanism and idealism was a sickness of the age, and ended, chillingly, with the statement that Germany, no longer able to produce a Goethe, could instead produce a Caesar.⁶⁶



Child mutilation: this pamphlet, reporting the 1915 inquiry into German atrocities in France, was published in French, English and Italian. Intense diplomacy and Allied propaganda led neutral Italy to join the Triple Entente and declare war on its erstwhile allies Germany and Austria–Hungary.

Cooking the books

Whatever the disposition of the trustees to showcase war literature favourable to the Allied cause, and to limit access to German, hostile or neutral material, modern readers are indebted to their initiative in building – as their language evolved – ‘a good collection’, ‘a special collection’, a ‘universal collection’.

That collection continued to expand in the postwar (now post-World War I) era. The Library held a total of almost 350,000 volumes at the end of 1919, a year when it also received a record 48,583 newspapers. Readers' fascination with the war showed no signs of abating: 'The number of books on the late war,' Chief Librarian Armstrong almost lamented, 'is ... very large, and is growing so rapidly that it is difficult to provide the necessary shelving accommodation.'⁶⁷ General inquiries were diminishing, but interest in divisional and regimental histories was expected to surge as they became available.⁶⁸ In London early in 1920, Sotheran's renamed its Piccadilly War Room the New Books Department, ready to cater for the appetite for up-to-date war literature.⁶⁹ Melbourne's Public Library continued as a client. Between 1919 and 1929 alone at least 1200 war monographs were added. The trustees also hoped to extend their collection in another direction. Having 'received few gifts of manuscripts or works actually issued on the field of war' they 'hope[d] to get more of these as time passes, and they have been promised assistance from the offices of the Defence Department who are dealing with the establishment of a War Museum.'⁷⁰ This ambition would not be fulfilled for many decades, just as the 1913 dream of a library of two million volumes by 1963 was not realised.

Some 50 years after the opening of the domed reading room and the outbreak of the European war, the Library had about one million books, rather than the anticipated three million. Housed in what would become known as 'Armstrong's folly,' exposed in open stacks to dust, and to guano deposited by invading birds, and to the sharply varying temperatures of Melbourne's seasons and the vagaries of the Library's heating and cooling system, those million books were being cooked indeed. Underfunded and languishing, understaffed and demoralised, the Library was described in 1964 as 'a once great Library now moribund'.⁷¹ But the failures of the interwar years, and the gathering parsimony of post-World War II governments, should not distract us from valuing highly the very real achievement of the 1914-18 wartime trustees and of Chief Librarian Armstrong – the creation of what is Australia's, and possibly one of the world's, greatest collections of war monographs and pamphlets.