

CHAPTER X

THE camera has played a sterling part in the propaganda of the China war lords in arousing sympathy for themselves in America against the Japanese. More fake pictures have been foisted on the American Press by these Chinese propagandists than can ever be accounted for. Their release has been timed nicely to make one horror overlap another. One of the first was the posing of a crying babe in the ruins of a bomb-wrecked street in the heart of Shanghai. It made the news reels. And it was printed in nearly every daily paper in the United States. The picture showed wrecked buildings and then there was discerned the figure of a tiny child in rags, rubbing its eyes, its mouth open, wailing. There were two angles to this picture which the American public never got. In the first place the child was posed in a street bombed by the Chinese when the Nanking aviators dropped their shells on the Cathay and Palace Hotels in what is generally regarded as an attempt to bring about intervention. Hundreds died, were blown to bits, by Chinese bombs dropped among their own people, but when the smoke and some of the wreckage had been cleared

away this child was thrust into the street and the cameras trained upon it. One camera, however, caught the picture of the child being posed by a Chinese. It was not used in the United States, but did find its way to Japan but too late to be distributed over the world and refute the fake. Hundreds of thousands of Americans saw that picture of a Chinese child crying amid the ruins of the bomb-ruined street and indignation was aroused against the "inhuman Japanese" who perpetrated this "outrage." There have been many pictures like it. And each picture has earned its quota of enemies for Japan.

There was still another picture which inflamed the American people against the Japanese and which was as palpable a fake ever put over on the public of this country. But it rang the bell and elicited a feeling of intense repulsion. I will attempt to describe it minutely and will wager that like hundreds of thousands of others you were shocked and horrified by it. It was the photograph of two men, both soldiers, one of them with a bayoneted gun poised at the breast of the other who was bound, blindfolded at that, to a stake, helpless before the steel thrust of the free man. The caption under the picture gave forth the information that Japanese soldiers were at bayonet practice on Chinese prisoners. In other words, the Japanese soldiers were using human targets for their bayonet practice.

At first glance the thing bowled you over. Your natural reaction was repulsion and horror, repulsion at a people who could do such a thing and horror over the inhuman act itself. If men did these things they were entitled to no consideration. Well the little joker in the pack in that picture was that neither of the two men was Japanese, not even the soldier with the bayonet. Both of them were Chinese. And it was not a posed picture either, a picture faked like so many others for the purposes of propaganda. It was a photograph, an actual photograph, taken some time ago of one of Chiang Kai-shek's soldiers executing a prisoner of his own race and blood. The executioner who was going about his work with a refined Cathian cruelty at the time he was pictured wore the uniform of a soldier of the Chinese-Nanking Government and no other. Any man who has ever been with the Chinese and the Japanese armies and is familiar with the uniform, instantly, and at a glance, knew that. But how many Americans ever saw a Chinese or a Japanese soldier?

A reputable news service was made the unwitting victim of this faked propaganda picture that on sight turned millions against the Japanese and burned deep into the hearts of thousands a resentment, if not hatred, of them. And yet, the picture as captioned and represented had no truth in it. It was an execution all right, a horrible

way to put a man to death no matter what he had done, but not an execution by a Japanese.

The Japanese government denied it in time, but like most of its denials of these propaganda thrusts the denial came too late and even then it was not given anything like the prominence in space that the original picture was. Where a thousand saw the picture but one saw the denial and then didn't give it credence. It was just one of those clever propaganda tricks employed by the Chiang Kai-shek defense that got over and did untold harm.

The war in China gave forth many heart-rending scenes. The innocent, as in all wars, suffered. The heart of every man and woman bleeds for these victims of war in every land. But when the misery of the masses is exploited for political purposes, when photographs are framed without a vestige of fact and are used to sway our sympathies it is well that we call a halt.

We Americans were fooled in the World War with a lot of things that were not actually so. After the war was over we could look back and marvel how we fell for some of them. But they were cleverly arranged for our benefit and to stir our sympathies then and they passed at the time as the unwritten truth. Belgian children writhing on the end of German bayonets. How we swallowed that one. Well, just as raw stuff has reached you from China and behind it was the idea to get us excited and aroused and hating a nation that seeks

our friendship. Whenever we begin to feel ourselves slipping in sentiment on an international issue it is good to pause and look behind the story or the picture that has particularly aroused our indignation against any people.

We Americans are supposed to be a simple lot—wise at home but something of boobs abroad. Don't let the other fellow fool us all of the time. And what a good idea it would be if as a whole we let Asia and Europe at that take care of their own troubles. We've got enough of our own.