

THE EDITORIAL CARTOON

BY ROLLIN KIRBY

THAT pictorial editorial known as the political cartoon has been a long-established device for the sudden exposition of an idea — a thing of but one point of view with no qualification whatever. Be it well conceived and well drawn or just middling or downright bad, it has become a part of the editorial opinion of the daily press and magazines. In any case, it follows the policies of whatever paper employs the cartoonist.

As far as I know, there is only one cartoonist who enjoys complete freedom from editorial dictation, and that happy man is David Low of the London *Evening Standard*. Despite the fact that he occasionally pokes fun at his employer, Lord Beaverbrook, Low is given *carte blanche* and, if any one can hit a head where he sees it with a pen and inflict grievous wounds, here's your man. Unlike most cartoonists, he is also an excellent caricaturist so that his cartoons carry an added sting because there is an indictment in the very faces of his victims. Look at his portraits of Laval — really, Low, no one can have sunk so far down in the

human scale as that! A simian sub-human, but still Laval.

Low works for the most part on the wide canvas of the European scene in wartime. Still, locally, there is his ineffable Colonel Blimp, that naked, betoweled, walrus-mustached old Tory with his eternal, "Gad, Sir!" to needle the smug enemies of change and progress. I consider Low to be the best and most influential cartoonist now working for the daily press.

Just what makes a successful cartoon? By that I mean what are the elements that cause special ones to stand out and be remembered? I haven't the slightest idea. Let us take, for instance, one of the most famous ones, John Tenniel's *Dropping the Pilot*. Here old Bismarck goes down the ship's ladder toward the waiting dinghy as the young Emperor William II hangs over the rail and gazes down at the departing pilot. There is nothing especially dramatic in the picture. In fact, it is rather static. Hundreds of other cartoons have treated like subjects in much the same manner;

ROLLIN KIRBY is rated by his fellow artists as one of the greatest editorial cartoonists the United States has produced. His *Prohibitionist*, created when he was editorial cartoonist of the *New York World*, has become one of the best known cartoon symbols. Three times he was awarded Pulitzer Prizes for the best cartoons of the year.

yet this one caught the world's fancy and it lives on as a great historical example. The occasion that gave it birth was, of course, a great one, greater by far than anything the *Punch* editorial staff that ordered it could possibly have anticipated. I say "ordered it" for it is a matter of record that in the fifty years Tenniel served *Punch* he never furnished a single idea for a cartoon.

Then there was Homer Davenport's *He's Good Enough For Me*, wherein a badly drawn Uncle Sam lays a mummy's hand on T.R.'s shoulder. Here is a cartoon without distinction

either in execution or idea. And again the country acclaims it and it is remembered. In a discussion of this particular cartoon with a friend, he suggested that its longevity was accounted for by the fact that its caption gave a political slogan to a campaign. That may well be the correct reason.

In the case of Thomas Nast's work, the situation was somewhat different. He came upon the scene at a time of great political corruption and he was fortunate enough to have an employer who stood by him through thick and thin, and believe me, it was



"That's Not France"

By DAVID LOW

Originally published in the London *Evening Standard*, July 14, 1940. Copyright, by Low in all countries. See Mr. Kirby's comment



TENNIEL'S *Dropping the Pilot*

From *Punch*, London, March 1890. See Mr. Kirby's comment.



"He's Good Enough for Me"

Drawn by Homer Davenport. From the *New York Evening Mail*, 1904.

pretty thick at times. He also had the advantage of what amounted to no competition. That alone, however, does not account for the impact he made upon his time. He was not a good artist but he was a great cartoonist. His inventions of the Tammany tiger, the GOP elephant and the Democratic donkey have helped to keep his fame alive long after the records of the gallant fights he made

have sunk into the dusty archives of our national history.

It was his battle against the Tweed ring that placed Nast in the cartoon hall of fame. Here, for the first time, a great criminal and his gang were brought to justice largely through the efforts of a cartoonist. Here was an earlier Zola crying, *J'accuse!* And so we who, by conviction, follow the crusading line look upon his work as

the most important in the history of American cartooning.

I do not mean to suggest that in other times the cartoonists have not done yeoman service in times of corruption in our national history, but merely to point out that Nast's contribution stands quite alone in individual accomplishment. Another example of the deadly effect of a cartoon was Joseph Keppler's depiction of James G. Blaine as *The Tattooed Man* which, together with the Rev. Samuel D. Burchard's bombshell phrase, "Rum, Romanism and Rebellion," had such a disastrous effect upon the political fortunes of Mr. Blaine.

As in other routine jobs, the car-

toonist who produces a daily feature must, of necessity, come upon days when invention lags, when the day's news offers little in the way of ideas, and when the exigencies of the paper's policy run counter to his own convictions or, worse than all, when he is called upon to cartoon something he does not understand — some complicated economic problem such as a tax program, or what to do with Germany after the war, or a foreign policy whose real meaning is buried in the silence of the State Department, or a Federal housing program. These are subjects for specialists, and the cartoonist whose whole training has been in other fields finds himself, if he is a



Nast's *The Tammany Tiger Let Loose* — "What Are We Going to Do About It?"

From *Harper's Weekly*, circa 1870. See Mr. Kirby's comment on page 543.

person of integrity, biting his nails in frustration.

To be a first-rate cartoonist he should be a sound economist, historian, statesman and artist — in fact, quite a fellow. Is it any wonder, then, that we of the guild do not make a better showing? All this is not to say, however, that as a class we are a group of journalistic hacks. Every once in a while, on the law of averages, we hit upon (mostly without knowing it) a day when eye and hand and idea come together in happy combination and the result is gratifying.

How much cartoons influence public opinion is a moot point, for there is no Gallup poll on this question to send its ubiquitous inquirers abroad with notebooks and pencils. Too many persons generally read only such papers as exploit their own opinions, so that whatever the cartoonist may say usually fits into and fortifies their own convictions and prejudices. As such, they can have no great influence, for they simply confirm opinions already formed. It would be an interesting experiment for, say, a right-wing paper to print a left-wing cartoon occasionally, or vice versa, in an unheard-of effort to present both sides of the question. Newspapers are doing this with columnists, with the papers assuming no responsibility for the columnists' opinions.

Although I have mentioned it before on several occasions, it seems worth reiterating that the cartoon of approbation is rarely successful. It may be due to the innate cussedness of

the human animal that if he is told a man was or is good it arouses no great enthusiasm. If a really bad character is held up to him in scorn and derision, the response is immediate, probably not so much because he is moral as because his own opinion has been confirmed. So it comes down to the fact that the most effective cartoon is one of attack.

As did the last war, this one furnishes the cartoonist with a never-ending supply of subjects, and even on dull days Hitler and Goering and Goebbels cringe under a shower of Allied bombs or are relentlessly driven before the advancing Allies. Adolf races in front with eyes full of terror; Hermann pounds along shedding medals, his fatness exuding cartoon perspiration, while little Joe fetches up in the rear with his melon-shaped head and clubfoot. This sort of picture can never change anyone's opinion and must be regarded as a filler. I have made quite a few of these in my time myself, so I speak without criticism of my fellowworkers in the Fourth Estate vineyard.

During World War I, Louis Ræmaekers, the Dutch cartoonist, became world-known as a depicter of German atrocities. In a great many of his cartoons he used the religious motif — Christ appeared time and time again, a Christ rebuking the oppressors or a Christ crucified. He has used the same symbolism more recently, but almost no other cartoonist has followed his example. Does the almost complete absence of this sort of symbolism in

the present war indicate a lessening of religious feeling, or is it that there is no other editorial cartoonist today who has Raemaekers' piety? It is an interesting question.

It must be said, I fear, that the

daily political cartoon has become just one of the filler features in a newspaper. Readers are accustomed to the makeup of their favorite paper, the comic strips, the columnists and the editorial cartoon. These become a



Boston

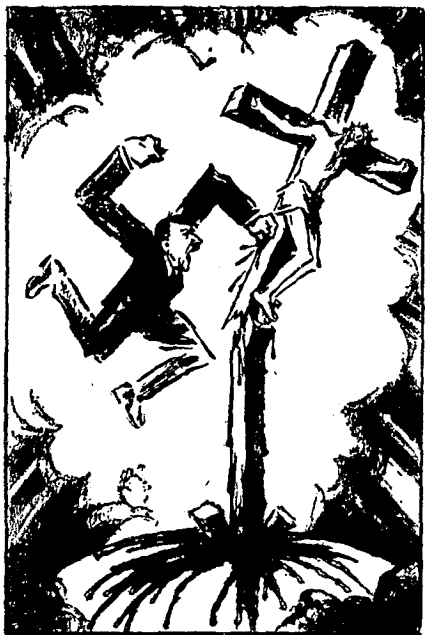
BY ROLLIN KIRBY

Originally published in the *New York World*, 1929. From *Highlights, A Cartoon History of the Nineteen Twenties*. Copyright, 1931, William Farquhar Payson.

habit, something to be glanced through with no show of enthusiasm, yet something that would be sorely missed, like a familiar face.

Given the chance by the publisher, the opportunity is ever there for the effective editorial cartoon. There is the spread of white paper, there is the ink and there is the crayon. Only we ourselves, the artists, are the necessary ingredient needed to produce the thing that will catch the world's mind and heart. I still think we have a high entertainment and critical value.

In extenuation of our shortcomings,



Raemaekers' "*Mein Kampf*"

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I wish to point out that we work with fewer tools than the writer. The range of our medium is more restricted and we are forced to fall back upon symbols, hoary with age and worn by repetition, to tell our little stories. Uncle Sam, John Bull, the British lion, Mars, Peace, the American eagle, Britannia, the Nast menagerie of animals, Marianne and an occasional interloper like Prohibition go onto our production line, not through choice, but rather because the public has come to know these characters who need no label.

Some of these symbols almost never come off. Our old friend Mars is a conspicuous example of complete frustration on the part of the cartoonist. A sort of Dawn-man, hairy and be-whiskered, dressed in the costume of an ancient Greek or Roman warrior, who really belongs in a comic strip, seems to be the best the cartoonist can evolve in his presentation of the brutality and devastation of war. During World War I, Boardman Robinson drew for the New York *Tribune* an occasional figure of this monster that came near to the embodiment of what it should represent. But Robinson was a very fine artist and a man of imagination.

Lest the foregoing seems to stress too much the ineffectualness of the cartoonist as an influence upon his time, I think it can be said with truth that if there has been a decline it has pretty much followed the same downward trend of the written editorial in our daily press.

HOW TO CIVILIZE GERMANY

BY EMERY REVES

IN HIS first radio announcement to Germany on September 18, 1944, General Eisenhower, in proclaiming the Allied Military Government in Germany, declared that the AMG will "begin the task of destroying National Socialism. It will remove from responsible positions all members of the Nazi Party and of the SS and others who have played a leading part in the National Socialist régime." We can be certain that this is more than an announcement made for military reasons by the Allied Supreme Commander; it is a declaration of policy established by the Allied governments. It is my sincere conviction that this policy towards defeated Germany is based on a fundamental political and psychological error which will aggravate rather than solve the German problem.

The capitulation of Germany is now a question of weeks or, at most, months, and the closer we come to this event, the more passionate will

become the controversy about what to do with Germany. The proposals which have been under public discussion can be divided into two groups: the "soft peace" and the "harsh peace" plans. On both sides, most of the arguments are, I believe, unrealistic, and it is virtually certain that none of them will be followed. This violent clash of opinions may well lead, as in 1919, to a compromise which, as we have learned from experience, is the worst solution of all.

Perhaps it is not yet too late to draw public attention to the fact that this strong division of views exists because our aims are not defined and the fundamental issues involved are utterly confused. What are the main arguments on the two sides?

The advocates of a harsh peace point out that in the last eighty years Germany has staged five aggressive wars, that these aggressions are manifestations of certain warlike characteristics inherent in the Germanic race,

EMERY REVES is the author of *A Democratic Manifesto*, published in 1942, and more recently of a series of discussions in the *New York Times*, which have been widely commented upon. In 1930 he founded the *Co-operation Press Service*, which had among its authors such men as Winston Churchill, Anthony Eden, Paul Reynaud, Count Sforza, and others. He writes on European affairs as one who has been in contact with many of the leading statesmen of the last twenty years. The opinions in this article are his own and do not necessarily reflect those of THE AMERICAN MERCURY.