



F. B. Oppen's suggestion to the clergy in 1895.

Cartoons and Comics

A HISTORY OF AMERICAN GRAPHIC HUMOR (1865-1938). Vol. II. By William Murrell. New York: Published for the Whitney Museum of American Art by the Macmillan Company. 1938. \$6.50.

Reviewed by JOHN W. WINTERICH

HERE, in superb reproduction, is a vivid panorama of the cartoon in America from the fall of the Emperor Maximilian to the rise of the equally futile but perpetually extricable Donald Duck. An earlier volume carried the story through the Civil War; this one takes it from the Radical hegemony of the later sixties through the eras of the Tweed Ring and the full dinner-pail and the Big Stick to Teapot Dome and technocracy and the C.I.O. For by its symbols shall every age be identifiable unto those which come after. Only William Green, perhaps, can appreciate just how much of John L. Lewis's *réclame* inheres in his eyebrows.

Mr. Murrell's notes, while necessarily sketchy owing to the demands made on his space by the problem of stowing 242 drawings in 271 pages, provide a lively commentary and announce an occasional discovery of importance, as, for example, his identification of the "N" of the Frank Leslie publications with William Newman, a *Punch* artist who emigrated to the United States and "quickly made himself familiar with the American viewpoint on public questions and political issues—an achievement few British-born cartoonists have ever attained."

It was Newman and his contemporaries who opened the door for Thomas Nast. The murky ethics of the day demanded the mordant, the corrosive, in satire, and

Nast and his fellow-laborers provided it. They wrought usually on almost cyclo-ramic scale—it is significant that Nast himself more than once staged his savage assaults in the simulacrum of a Roman amphitheater.

The broadsword and the bludgeon of the seventies have given way to the rapier and the dart, which have not the same high capacity for the transfer of invective. And just as too many "commentators" have made piffle of too many editorial pages, so has the comic strip (which has yet to celebrate its semi-centennial) taken the graphic accent from the political cartoon. During the war Cyrus LeRoy Baldridge of *The Stars and Stripes*, after dragging the Kaiser or the even more caricaturable Crown Prince over the hurdles of hate for the next issue, was wont to circulate among the troops in quest of those fine bits of reporting in crayon which later saw print as "I Was There." Invariably he was mistaken for A. A. Wallgren, the paper's comic artist, whose military assignment it was to make the army laugh at itself. Baldridge's efforts to convince the troops that he was the other cartoonist availed naught. There *was* no other cartoonist. Oddly enough, Mr. Murrell seems to fall into the same confusion when he refers to the contents of "I Was There" as "amusing graphic notes."

One must view the future of the comic strip considered as a social problem with real foreboding. The moral and intellectual factors may be negligible; equally so the question of wasted time. But until their creators draw bigger balloons and achieve a more legible letter, our children will all be blind inside a generation, and where will the comics be then?

British Politicians of Yesterday

THE CAPTAINS AND THE KINGS DEPART, JOURNALS AND LETTERS OF REGINALD VISCOUNT ESHER. Edited by Oliver, Viscount Esher. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1938. 2 vols. \$7.50.

Reviewed by WALLACE NOTESTEIN

THESE volumes are a continuation of the earlier volumes, "Journals and Letters of Reginald Viscount Esher, 1870-1903." Together the four volumes of letters and diaries skillfully fitted together make up a running commentary on British politics of the last two generations. As materials for the historian they may rank with Greville for an earlier time. They cover much the same period as Blunt and are more important.

Lord Esher, after serving as a Liberal M.P., took his own line as an independent in politics; he refused cabinet posts, he turned down a step in the peerage, and even the viceroyalty of India, refusals he does not fail to record. He believed that if he remained outside of parties and had no axes to grind he could exercise more power. It is true that as a young man he had asked a peerage for his father, which of course eventually fell to him, and later he requested political posts for both his sons. But fathers looking out for promising sons must be forgiven much. Power Esher did crave. The friend of Edward VII and later (in these volumes) of George V, he was consulted by Prime Ministers and by other members of the Government, by leaders of the Opposition, and by the powers in the Army and Navy. It is possible, I think, that in his later years his influence had waned and that he was less welcome in his advisory capacity than earlier.

Naturally he has much to tell us. The George V who appears in these volumes was more capable of complicated thought and of careful distinction than has been supposed. Whether Esher unconsciously put into the mouth of Majesty his own thoughts it is hard to say. John (Viscount) Morley crosses the pages frequently, a somewhat crotchety and self-seeking man, less wise in action than in writing. About Bonar Law (whose measure he had taken), Sir Edward (Viscount) Grey, Winston Churchill, Campbell-Bannerman, Asquith, Lloyd George, Kitchener, French, and Haig we learn not a little. Esher was a fairly good judge of men and, if he was sometimes pleasantly generous in his estimates of his friends, he furnishes the stuff of conversations and the criss-cross of talk that give the reader clues.

Esher was a good judge of politics and events. He was one of the first political figures to realize the danger from Germany, though Frederic Harrison and

George Meredith had sensed it much earlier. For a decade before 1914 he regarded the Great War as more certain than it was. As early as 1916 he began thinking about the kind of peace that should be made. In June of 1919 he wrote: "The Peace Conference has at any rate succeeded in this, that a future war upon an even bigger scale becomes inevitable." He was certain, and remained certain, that sooner or later Germany would take Holland.

There are interesting details of peace tentatives during the war. The most credible is that of September, 1917. At the end of October Briand told Esher that the Germans had approached King Albert of the Belgians and M. de Brocqueville, Prime Minister of Belgium, with an offer of the return of all occupied territories and the cession of Alsace-Lorraine (subject to two conditions). Briand was asked to go to Switzerland and meet Baron von Lancken, the German representative. The French received the proposal coldly and conveyed a truncated version of it to Lloyd George with the suggestion that it might be a trap.

Esher was a cool observer of the world; also a romantic. Good-looking actresses and duchesses he liked to meet, and especially if they had something in their heads. Barrie was a favorite author. In his letters to his second son, who was a long while courting the musical comedy actress, Zena Dare, whom he was at length to marry, Esher betrays a romantic idealism that belongs north of the Border. Only part Scot himself, he was happiest beyond the Tweed in the home he called The Roman Camp. Scottish scenery and Scottish traditions seemed to renew his spirit.

It was the Scot in him that made him face with equanimity the social changes he foresaw. His own class, from whom he believed the best leadership was recruited, was passing. That passing was to him part of a stage scene which he would watch, or the affecting end of a stirring ballad. He would not take it too hard. It was not merely drama and poetry, it was part of the story of the race. From early youth he had been a reader of history and so was prepared for change.

He was prepared for bad times ahead. He did not believe in the League of Nations, and from the beginning poohpoohed Wilson. Wilson and his friends reminded him of the early Christians standing white-robed in the arena, hemmed in by wild beasts and shouting crowds. "The unpleasant reflection is that these same early Christians destroyed the Roman Empire and plunged Europe into the shadows of the Dark Ages."

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Drama in America

THE AMERICAN THEATRE. By John Anderson, and The Motion Picture in America, by René Fülöp-Miller. New York: The Dial Press. 1938. \$5.

Reviewed by JOHN CORBIN

IN a volume of young-folk size and primer type, John Anderson devotes one hundred pages to "an interpretive history" of the American theater, allots René Fülöp-Miller ninety pages for "a history in the making" of our motion pictures—and well over two hundred pages to photographs of the great ones in both, together with stage sets and sketches of costume and scenery by our leading theatric artists, the last in rather



Sketch by Aaron Douglas for Eugene O'Neill's "The Emperor Jones."

splendid color. This colored-primer layout suggests a certain infantilism not inappropriate to the subject; but in some measure the suggestion is misleading.

Mr. Anderson's interest in acting and in the theater *qua* theater is at best lukewarm; he comes to the boiling point only when there is question of the drama as interpreting American life, as there assuredly is today. Granting that the plays of the pre-Anderson period were, at their best, mere vehicles for comedians and tragedians of genius, even a hundred-page history might well record the profound impression made upon men of their time by Joseph Jefferson and Edwin Booth, of whom we find little more than their names and photographs — not to mention Richard Mansfield, as Mr. Anderson does not. Life begins with Augustus Thomas and Clyde Fitch, both of whom "were capable of shrewd observation."

As to Fitch, in this world in which "any character on the stage who wears a

collar button is a dirty capitalist," there is a tendency "to minimize his achievements." His plays have "fidelity to detail and an occasional sharp commentary on social manners and customs" which foreshadow the more modern drama. Yet "they are more concerned with personality than with character." The distinction is not quite clear. Certainly the heroine of "The Girl with the Green Eyes," as played by Clara Bloodgood, was a poignant study in wifely jealousy, as she of "The Truth" was in feminine tarradiddles. William Vaughn Moody's success with "The Great Divide" is barely recorded, with no hint of its importance as precursor of the virility of subsequent drama; and his other acted play, "The Faith Healer," is credited with a similar popularity, though it failed—in spite of the fact that William Archer (rather unaccountably) acclaimed it the best American play.

With Eugene O'Neill Mr. Anderson comes into his own. Acknowledging the futility of certain experiments, as the masks in "The Great God Brown," and the Freudian asides in "Strange Interlude," he yet gives O'Neill full credit for restless originality and uncompromising courage. For each of the other capable dramatists of today Mr. Anderson has a word, and generally Mercutio's "word and a blow." Maxwell Anderson, whom he reluctantly places next to O'Neill, is "a man of compassionate nature and depth of anger" whose "prose works suggested the poet without pointing to him." But, most unfortunately, the "passionate pentameters" of both Maxwell Anderson and Archibald MacLeish arouse in John Anderson a horror lest the theater "return to all its old glories and live again even in the bombastic periods of its worst rant." Philip Barry "can be as bright and shiny as a bubble—and, on occasion, as empty." Rachel Crothers has wit, but only the wit that "makes the obvious seem snappy." And so on down the line.

Mr. Fülöp-Miller is deeply and perhaps unduly depressed by the fact that the motion picture must needs address itself not only to "the butcher, the baker, the candlestick-maker" of our own sprawling land but to those of "the whole world from Yokohama to Budapest and from Stockholm to Buenos Aires, ignoring no human settlement." He devotes many and perhaps needless pages to a Freudian psychology of the proletarian escape-impulse, as it eventuates in "bathing beauties," the pasteboard palaces of Hollywood, and the ultimate erotic clinch. The art problem is that of making "silk purses out of sows' ears." But there are good omens.

The rebel leader, Pancho Villa, was paid \$25,000 to do his best to fight the most important battles near the film