

## Introduction

WITH civilization so topsy-turvy with conflict, with social catastrophe already bruising our heels, our artists can no longer afford to dawdle with the trivial or flirt with the inane. They cannot afford to dream when action is so imperative. Nor can they afford to prettify the nebulous, when the real is so drastic and forbidding.

If art is to become other than an amusement for the fatigued merchant, the tired flapper, and the jaded libertine, it must rise from the individual to the social, and endeavor to attain a revolutionary beauty commensurate with radical vision and aspiration. Art must have social purpose and plan.

The cartoon is a form of art that immediately lends itself to social interpretation. The cartoon, in fact, has become an active expression of contemporary civilization. It has developed into a medium of comment and criticism that is essential to our culture. The cartoon represents a kind of snap-shot logic that often is sharper than words, and more effective than argument. A philosophy is captured in a flash of lines or scorned with a simple gesture. In brief, the cartoon speaks a language that is direct, pithy and dramatic.

In these days of modern psychology the importance of the emotions in forming judgments and confirming conclusions has been amply demonstrated. Cartoons have an immediate effect upon the emotional process. They can by their directness of presentation agitate, propagandize and inspire. They give emotional tonus to intellectual attitudes. They give spirit to logic, reason to tactics.

These cartoons are cartoons of social meaning and economic significance. They are conceived in the spirit of the class struggle and devoted to the definite purpose of class propaganda. Despite the canine ululations of the bourgeois critics, the artistic clarity and forcefulness of these cartoons do not suffer as a consequence. On the other hand, the animus that motivated their creation seems to have infused them with emotion molten in intensity and magnificent in sweep.

Such collections as the Red Cartoons of 1926 and 1927 are, after all, a development in the cartoon genre that has come only after numerous evolutions in its substance. The word cartoon is derived from the Italian "cartone," which means pasteboard, and the real cartoon, according to its original character, is a large picture in fresco, oil or tapestry. It served as the model of the finished work. The word cartoon was not employed until 1843, when a large exhibition of real cartoons was held in Westminster Hall, from which selections were made of the designs for the decoration in the fresco of the new houses of parliament. What are now known as cartoons were originally

called caricatures. Political caricatures naturally did not develop until after printing was invented and rapid circulation of material could be realized. It is interesting to note the growth of the genre. The earliest caricature (or as today called cartoon) is a French engraving that dates back to 1499, in which Louis XII is depicted playing cards with the Doge of Venice and the Swiss ruler, while the other rulers of Europe are forced to look on. In the seventeenth century caricatures multiplied. One of the most amusing and at the same time bitter, is that inspired by the Protestants who fled to England after the edict of Nantes had been revoked in 1685—the caricature consisted of twenty-four hideous faces grotesquely similar to the ministers and courtiers of Louis. In England the bourgeois was frequently caricatured by the artists of the aristocracy. One of these caricatures representing "The High Court of Justice, or Oliver's Slaughter House," is especially clever and memorable. In 1710 in the notorious proceedings against Dr. Sacheverell, caricature became a salient weapon. It was at this time that the word "caricature" came into common use.

Hogarth and Cruikshank were the leaders of the bourgeois satirists in their effort to use caricature for the moral ends of the bourgeoisie. In America, Thomas Nast was the famous political cartoonist. Defending the Republican party during the Civil War and attacking Tammany afterwards, Nast was important in making the cartoon popular in the United States. Puck, Judge and then Life followed with cartoons as one of their central attractions. It was Life magazine that, for instance, discovered the work of Charles Dana Gibson.

In England, Max Beerbohm chalked a change in the attitude of the cartoonist. Beerbohm was the Sinclair Lewis of cartoonery. Instead of playing up the bourgeoisie as had his predecessors, in particular Hogarth and Cruikshank, he satirized it. But Beerbohm's caricatures had more of fun than earnestness about them, more of mischievous contempt than of deep hatred.

The proletarian cartoonist is a new figure to emerge. In the attitude of the radical cartoonists of today there is firm-set realization that the time for playful piquancies is past, and that pictorial satire and exposure must be undertaken in profound seriousness. **Red Cartoons** bears out this fact with unequivocal emphasis. The absurdities and injustices of a class-strangled society must not be twisted into form evocative of laughter, but revealed with candor productive of hatred.

In this form, then, **Red Cartoons** has social power and revolutionary significance. Its purpose is at once challenge and inspiration.

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