

# Books of The Times

## Happy (Boo-Boop-a-Doop) Holidays

By ELIOT FREMONT-SMITH

**THE PENGUIN BOOK OF COMICS: A Slight History Devised by George Perry and Alan Aldridge. Illustrated. 256 pages. Penguin. Paperback, \$4.50.**

**LADY IN THE SHOWER. By Peter Arno. Illustrated. 140 pages. Simon & Schuster. \$4.95.**

**ALL THUMBS. By Warren Miller. Introduction by Whitney Balliett. Illustrated. Unpaginated. Bobbs-Merrill. \$3.95.**

**LARGE ECONOMY MAN. By Terence Parkes (Larry). Illustrated. Unpaginated. Stephen Greene Press. \$2.95.**

**GREAT CARTOONS OF THE WORLD. Edited by John Bailey. Illustrated. 136 pages. Crown. \$4.95.**

**BEST CARTOONS OF THE YEAR. Edited by Lawrence Lariat. Illustrated. Unpaginated. Dodd, Mead. \$3.95.**

**THOMAS NAST: Political Cartoonist. By J. Chal Vinson. Illustrated. Unpaginated. University of Georgia Press. \$8.50.**

**A NATION GRIEVED: The Kennedy Assassination in Editorial Cartoons. Edited by Raymond B. Rajske. Introduction by Arthur Schlesinger Jr. Illustrated. 134 pages. Tuttle. \$5.**

WHAT is Christmas without cartoon books? What are cartoon books without Christmas? Ask silly questions and you get evasive answers. In any case, the cartoon book has become an under-the-tree staple, and I, for one, think we are richer for it—if not always, each and every one, funnier. Of course, we should be funnier (it goes along with being kinder, more empathic, showing goodwill, etc.), but this is fundamentally a matter for teachers and theologians, not reviewers.

The list above, though by no means complete, does convey the enormous variety of cartoon humor (and seriousness) new this season. Tastes differ, and for my own, it is not the best of seasons (for one thing, there is no new George Price collection); but it will do.

### The Blondie That Was

For those who grew up on the comics of the thirties and forties, or who are curious about the mainspring of the pop subculture, the most interesting item will be "The Penguin Book of Comics," a formidable compendium of strip cartoons from prehistoric times to the modern neurotic superhero, Spiderman. The bulk of the collection focuses on American comics of the last 60 years, with a lot of early episodes of favorites.

It may come as a revelation, for instance, that staid, middle-class Blondie was once a vamp, a Depression Barbarella. "Tee hee," she cooed in 1930, when playboy Dagwood introduced her to his tycoon father, "I always feel so boo-boop-a-doop when I meet my boy friends' papas!" Later, of course, they were disinherited and retired to suburbia. A fine collection, also frustrating: we get snippets of adventures only. One also misses color: black-and-white reproduction cannot do justice to, say, "Little Nemo" or "Krazy Kat."

Peter Arno needs no introduction. Neither his rugged line nor the ribald gleam he puts in retired colonels' eyes has faltered since the glory days of "The Stag at Eve." "Lady in the Shower" is his first collection (nearly all from The New Yorker) in a

decade; the dowagers are still angry, the drunks still happy and the damsels still seeking distress.

In "All Thumbs," Warren Miller, another New Yorker cartoonist, shows a more surreal and surprising humor; his drawings are exactly as messy as the subject warrants, and many convey a sense of being haunted by the future. A sign in a room full of computers reads: "To err is unlikely, to forgive unnecessary."

Terence Parkes's captionless domesticated husband cartoons in "Large Economy Man" have a wide following. They are, for me, of the mildest-chuckles variety—the aproned husband seeming nothing more (nor less!) than a finally emasculated Andy Capp. It sent me back, perhaps for reassurance, to the still defiant Andy Capp in "The Penguin Book of Comics."

### Routine and Otherwise

"Great Cartoons of the World" could have been a great collection. The cartoonists are American and European, some famous; but the selection is dominated by routine work and routine, grunting gags. Routine is also the word for "Best Cartoons of the Year," Lawrence Lariat's 26th annual selection from American magazines, not including The New Yorker. In cartoons and comics, quality and originality count just as much as they do in anything else.

Thomas Nast was a pioneer of the editorial cartoon and one of the very best, in terms both of precision of caricaturing line and revealing political idea. He created the snarling Tammany tiger, a symbol of big-city corruption, and helped bring down the notorious Tweed Ring of New York under a relentless barrage of cartoons in 1869-71. He is most famous, however, for his creation of Santa Claus in modern guise and garb. J. Chal Vinson's "Thomas Nast: Political Cartoonist" is a superbly reproduced selection of Nast's work, and shows what an art editorial cartooning can be.

"A Nation Grieved" shows the art in very difficult circumstances, with mixed results. This is a morbid collection of newspaper editorial cartoons on the occasion of the Kennedy assassination, arranged by theme (grieving Uncle Sam, empty rocking-chair, "profiles in courage," etc.). Together they are numbing—and not very Christmassy. But it is an interesting volume nonetheless, as a cross-section of modern political cartooning, able and amateur, tasteful and treacly.

One conclusion is that there is clearly room for improvement in the art of caricature. The forthcoming "Hogarth to Cruikshank: Social Change in Graphic Satire," by M. Dorothy George (Walker, \$17.50), which should be available before Christmas (an import, it has been held up in a shipping strike), may provide some educational guidance. Beyond this, some of the best strip cartoons—"Pogo," "Peanuts," the Marvel Comic Group zoo of superheroes—are available in inexpensive paperback. So be prepared: after Christmas carols—Thwack! Crunch! Blam! These, too, can be sounds of joy.