

**RAEMAEKERS'
CARTOON HISTORY OF
THE WAR; VOLUME ONE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649169627

Raemaekers' cartoon history of the war; Volume one by Louis Raemaekers & J. Murray Allison

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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LOUIS RAEMAEKERS & J. MURRAY ALLISON

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RAEMAEKERS' CARTOON HISTORY OF THE WAR

COMPILED BY

J. MURRAY ALLISON

*Editor of Raemaekers' Cartoons, Kultur in Cartoons, The
Century Edition de Luxe Raemaekers' Cartoons, etc.*

VOLUME ONE

THE FIRST TWELVE MONTHS OF WAR



NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.

1919

FOREWORD

In all the welter of the tragic upheaval which is shattering institutions once thought immutable, condemning millions to physical death and awakening other millions to spiritual life, making staggering discoveries of unexpected human strength or weakness, thrusting men into fame one day or to oblivion the next, there has been nothing more dramatic than the sudden manifestation of the genius of the Dutchman, Louis Raemaekers, who, as Europe recoiled from the first shock of German barbarity, threw down his brush for his pencil and by the intensity of his spirit aroused the compassion and fired the anger of the world with his cartoons of the Belgian violation.

He, more than any other individual, has made intensely clear to the people the single issue upon which the war is joined. More than cartoonist, he is teacher and preacher, with the vision, faith, and intensity of a St. Francis, a Luther, or a Joan of Arc.

On August 1, 1914, we find him a quiet, gentle man, the son of a country editor, happy in his family, devout, contemplative, loving beauty and peace, contentedly painting the good and lovely things he saw among the tulip-fields and waterways, the cattle and the wind-mills of his own native Holland before the gray-clad millions of the Kaiser burst into the low countries with fire and sword.

Then comes the miracle of his transformation; the idyllic is thrust aside by the hideous reality; beauty is drowned in a bestial orgy of force; and in place of the passive painter arises the fiery preacher; the brush is discarded for the pencil, and the pencil in his hands becomes an avenging sword, because by it millions of people have been aroused to a clear-cut realization of the fact that

the issue of this war is no less than Slavery and Autocracy versus Freedom and Democracy.

The very first of his war cartoons indicated the prophetic vision of the man, and gave the first evidence of his inspiration and genius. It is called "Christendom after Twenty Centuries" and shows a bowed and weeping figure crouching under the sword and lash. It was drawn on that fateful day August 1st, 1914. The intensity of emotion shown in this drawing revealed his power for the first time. To Raemaekers himself it came as a vision and a summons. The landscape painter disappeared, and in his place arose a champion of civilization, throbbing with sublime rage and pity, clothed with authority, and invested with a weapon more powerful than the ruthlessness it indicts.

When the stories of the Belgian horror began to circulate in Holland, Raemaekers, like the rest of the humane world, refused to credit them. His own mother was German; he had spent many happy years in Germany; he knew the German peasant as a kindly and happy, if rather stupid fellow; it was incredible that such men could have done the awful things alleged. But the tales persisted, and although the evidence of the wracked and broken refugees who poured into his country by tens of thousands seemed irrefutable, he could not believe it, and readily seized upon the common supposition that the terrible stories were the product of the imagination of an overwrought and panic-stricken people. At length he could remain in doubt no longer, and quietly slipped over the frontier to verify for himself the truth or falsehood of the accusations that had already made Germany guilty of the foulest crimes ever perpetrated in the name of war since the dawn of civilization.

What he actually saw with his own eyes he does not tell. But a hundred of his early cartoons bear witness to the burning impression made upon his soul. Raemaekers, like others who have seen them, cannot speak of these unnamable horrors, but can only express his consuming pity or his white-hot rage in the medium

that lies nearest his hand. On one occasion only has he publicly referred to his experiences in Belgium. It was at a dinner given him by the artists and literary men of London at the Savage Club, where, pointing to the portraits and trophies of Peary, Scott, Nansen, Shackleton, and other explorers which hang on the walls, he said: "I, too, have been an explorer, Gentlemen. I have explored a hell, and it was terror unspeakable."

It did not take long for the High Command in Berlin to learn through its agents in Holland of the impression that was being created in the public mind by Raemaekers' cartoons. The publication of his first series of cartoons in the *Amsterdam Telegraaf*, reflecting the unspeakable horror of the atrocities in Belgium and denouncing with burning scorn the Kaiser and his infamous captains, gave such offense to the "All-Highest" in Potsdam that the German Government offered twelve thousand guilders for his body dead or alive! Further magnificent testimony to the hurt he inflicted on our common adversaries lies in the fact that the German Government, not content with offering a reward for his body, induced the Dutch Government to prosecute him for endangering the neutrality of Holland! He was actually tried on this charge, but although he had not spared the burghers and junkers of his own country for what he considered their criminal laxity in the matter of preparedness and their greed in aiding Germany by the smuggling of foodstuffs, etc., across the frontier, the jury acquitted him and the court tacitly confirmed his right to express his opinions.

It was after this that the *Cologne Gazette* in an editorial addressed to the Dutch people, obviously seeking to intimidate what its government could not suppress, said: "After the war Germany will settle accounts with Holland, and for each calumny, for each cartoon of Raemaekers, she will demand payment with the interest that is her due." German wrath followed him further. His life was constantly endangered at the hands of German agents

infesting Holland, and he had to be always on his guard, especially during his periodical excursions into Belgian territory occupied by the enemy. Even before he crossed to England, his wife received anonymous letters warning her that any ship he might sail on would surely be torpedoed.

As late as November, 1916, an exhibition of his cartoons in Madrid was forbidden by the Spanish Government upon the insistence of the German embassy in that capital.

It is significant to note that these attempted persecutions had an effect directly opposite to that intended. They not only failed to stop the publication of his cartoons but were largely instrumental in drawing the attention of the Allies and neutrals to the great champion that had arisen.

For eighteen months his cartoons had been appearing in the Amsterdam *Telegraaf* without exciting a more than mild interest outside Holland.

American and British war-correspondents returning to London from Amsterdam talked enthusiastically of the "Great Raemaekers" and a few stray cartoons appeared in the press of London and Paris. But he was practically unknown outside of Holland until Christmas week in December, 1915, a year and a half after his first war-cartoon had appeared.

A two-line advertisement announced his arrival in the British metropolis. "Exhibition of war-cartoons by Raemaekers, Fine Arts Galleries, Bond Street, admission one shilling," was all it said. While Londoners are generally interested in new artists, Raemaekers appeared at an inopportune time. For one thing, the public had been rather surfeited with war-literature and war-pictures and the work of an unknown foreign artist was scarcely likely to attract them, and for another, it was within a few days of Christmas, everybody was leaving London, and those who remained in town were bent on giving the troops and the war-sufferers as merry a time as possible.

It was quite by chance that the art critic of the *London Times* visited the Bond Street Galleries a day or so before Christmas, and Raemaekers' world-wide fame as it exists to-day may be said to date from the day that the *Times* in a two-column notice said, among other things, "this neutral is the only genius produced by the war."

The campaign of publicity launched by the *Times* was taken up by the British and French press. The public flocked to view, and were stunned as they had never been before by the damning record. The cumulative effect of such pictures as "The Shields of Rosselaere," showing men, women, and children forced to march in front of the German armies, "Men to the right, women to the left," in which women and children are being beaten with the butts of rifles; "The Exodus from Antwerp," "The Mothers of Belgium," "The Widows of Belgium," and others which revealed unimaginable depths of human agony, impressed the London crowd as by a solemn ritual. They saw with a vividness hitherto unapproached the hideousness of the war, the unequivocal brutality of the German method, and the naked, insatiable greed in the German purpose. Not now could the timidest soul believe that Germany was fighting a war of defense. Here was the fact inescapable that civilization itself was threatened; here was the whole carnival of lust and conquest as mercilessly depicted on the faces of its agents as they themselves had trampled onward to their shocking goal.

The exhibition was crowded daily for twenty weeks. From nine in the morning till six at night the galleries were packed with people of every grade of society. It is not too much to say that no oration, no literature, no art had brought the real meaning of the war home so convincingly to Londoners as these cartoons. Parents who had already given their sons, wives who had given husbands, were strengthened in their resignation and comforted in their sorrow; those who yet had the sacrifice to make were fortified in their resolve. As I have said, the cumulative effect of these hun-

dred and fifty cartoons on the emotions of a people just awakening to and suffering from the desperate realities of the war was almost overwhelming, and many a man and woman quivered and cried under this pitiless revelation of the stupendous suffering that had been and was yet to be.

The exhibition was carried from London to the principal English and Scottish cities, and thence to Paris. Everywhere the story was the same. Crowds flocked to see and heed the artist's fiery records; statesmen, soldiers, artists did him honor. In London he was received by the Prime Minister and the artistic and learned societies; in Paris he was made a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor and given a reception at the Sorbonne—the highest purely intellectual honor that can be bestowed upon any man. France, equally with England, acclaimed him as the new champion of humanity. In the provincial cities of England, as in London, crowds thronged the galleries daily for weeks at a time. In Liverpool alone five thousand persons visited the exhibition in one afternoon; Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, Glasgow, Edinburgh told the same story of the people being aroused and inspired as though a new evangel had come to tell them that their cause was sacred and their sacrifice not vain.

In a few months his genius was universally recognized and his position as the supreme cartoonist of the war firmly established. And now that he had the appreciation and the scope that were his due, he threw himself into his work with even greater ardor. He made recruiting posters for the army and navy; he depicted the shortage of shells and called on men and women to man the munition factories; he contributed posters to stimulate thrift and industry and contributions to the Government funds; he worked for both the British and the French Red Cross, and for private and public charities innumerable; his pen never flagged. While the wrongs of Belgium had been the first incentive to his genius, he now dealt with the war in all its later phases, and found subjects