

E. H. Gombrich, Review of Hambourg's Richard Doyle, McLean's George Cruikshank & Sarzano's Sir John Tenniel, Burlington Magazine, Vol. 90, 1948, pp.153 [Trapp no.1948C.1]

Richard Doyle, by Daria Hambourg; *George Cruikshank* by Ruarri McLean; *Sir John Tenniel*, by Frances Sarzano. (English Masters of Black and White. General Editor: Graham Reynolds.) (Art and Technics., Ltd.)

Of these pleasantly produced monographs it can really be said that they 'meet a long felt want'. Each of the volumes consists of some sixty pages of illustrations and of some forty pages of reading matter, including the essential biographical and bibliographical information which should facilitate a further study of artists whose popularity with the public seems hitherto to have deterred rather than attracted the serious historian of art. Reading these first three monographs in close succession one is struck by the number of traits which three artists as different in talent and achievement as Richard Doyle, George Cruikshank, and Sir John Tenniel had in common. All of them started very young on their artistic careers and retained the style of their youth more or less unchanged throughout their lives. All of them explicitly refused to draw from life and relied on their visual memory as a store of images and types. They all achieved a prodigious output, but frequently relied on others for the invention of their subject matters. All the three of them, finally, had higher aspirations and had, at one time or other in their lives, hoped to become painters of serious subjects - a topic which unfortunately falls largely outside the scope of these books. Similar traits recur with striking persistency in the psychological make-up of many of the leading humorous draughtsmen of the nineteenth century - in that of Wilhelm Busch in Germany and Dore and even Daumier in France. One wonders whether graphic journalism was not, at that time, the most suitable outlet for a type of artistic imagination which found no recognition in the 'official' conception of art? Much is permitted under the flag of humour that would have perplexed and outraged the public if presented as serious art. This may explain the fact that the happiest products of these artists are often those nearest to the 'doodle' - Richard Doyle's *Book of Nonsense* (still largely unpublished) and George Cruikshank's *My Sketchbook*. Even the least imaginative of the three, Tenniel, only found himself when Lewis Carroll showed him the way to Wonderland.

The stylistic and psychological position of these masters, therefore, offers so many fascinating problems that one feels sometimes inclined to regret that the contributors to the series have not wholly resisted the temptation of enlarging on the subject matter of the artist's work rather than on its artistic significance. Of Doyle's *Manners and Customs of ye Englyshe*, for instance, Dania Hambourg thinks that 'it is their social content, above all, which gives (them) their enduring interest ... at Lords, so the sketches inform us, the cricketers play in stovepipe hats, and on Derby Day a flock of pigeons is released to carry the news of the winner.' Such paraphrases make admittedly more agreeable reading than does a stylistic analysis, yet the 'purposely stiff and archaic manner' of Doyle's series might have deserved more than a passing reference. There is more than one underground link between the archaism of nineteenth-century Romantics (Tenniel got stuck in Cornelius' manner) and the parodistic primitivism of Toepffer, Busch, and Doyle. If the former appears as the first symptom of a malaise which led through Medievalism and Japonism to Africanism, the latter became the ancestor of the style of the comic strip, of Disney and of Thurber. But even if certain problems remain to be tackled the first three volumes of this welcome series have set a high standard which makes one look forward to their successors.