



"See, darling, I told you we couldn't have a Platonic friendship."

P  
E  
T  
E  
R



"Not a very jummy boat, is it?"

P  
A  
R  
A  
D  
E



A  
R  
N  
O



# PETER ARNO'S PARADE

THIRD EDITION

"A MASTERPIECE of wit and discernment. It is so very amusing that we rock with laughter and only realize twelve days later in the middle of the night that we have been laughing at ourselves."

**CARL VAN VECHTEN**

"PETER ARNO has all the terrible simplicity of a frank and penetrating child—a modern child, sophisticated and ruthless. No one is safe with him about. No place or condition is sacred. He is always in the bedroom at the worst moment. . . . As a draughtsman he need not learn from anyone. His statements are direct and complete, neither fussy nor tiresomely decorative. Every figure is alive."

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"YOUR elderly maiden Aunt in Cheltenham will probably not relish a copy of PETER ARNO'S PARADE, but for the young sophisticated, the bitter mirth of this young New Yorker will prove the right thing. I applaud the enterprise and courage of the publishers in giving us this selection of drawings—in it you will find comic genius."

**J. B. PRIESTLEY**

"PETER ARNO is the greatest comic artist of America. In these remarkable drawings human nature is always ludicrously contemptible. I shall sound old fashioned when I warn readers to keep this book out of the reach of children; but these drawings have the brutality of our own Gilray or Rowlandson."

**COMPTON MACKENZIE**

7/6  
NET

PETER ARNO'S  
PARADE



"I was discussing the Mexican situation with Bottomley today. It seems fraught with interest."

# PETER ARNO'S PARADE

WITH AN  
INTRODUCTION BY  
BEN TRAVERS

LONDON

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AN INTRODUCTION TO  
PETER ARNO  
BY BEN TRAVERS

THE CONTENTS of this book have been selected from those of two volumes published in America and entitled respectively, "Peter Arno's Parade" and "Peter Arno's Hullabaloo" (*sic*). The selection is, I think, representative rather than eclectic, but at any rate it enables us to gain a comprehensive view of the art of this remarkable humorist.

To "Peter Arno's Hullabaloo" Mr. Robert Benchley contributes an introductory Note on Pictorial Humour, which, while constituting a very clever essay, challenges any applied investigation of Peter Arno's products. Indeed, Mr. Benchley asserts that anyone attempting to analyse the Arno spirit should be shot down cold. Probably we shall be intimidated less by the threat of this comparatively everyday form of American reproach than by the feeling that the crime of analysing the Arno spirit is an exceedingly difficult one to accomplish.

This seems a pity, because we are constantly being told that we do not appreciate American humour, and it occurs to me that an analysis of the mentality and methods of a great American comic artist might prove a valuable commentary on this pressing international problem. So valuable, in fact, that anyone who could achieve such an analysis might face the prospect of being taken for a ride by Mr. Benchley with the equanimity of a Sydney Carton in his tumbrel.

No less an authority than Father Ronald Knox has stated that America has very little to show in the way of satire. If Father Knox has included

pictorial humour in his considerations, I find this assertion very puzzling. My own modest impression is that the humorous artists of America employ satire as their constant medium, whereas our artists are constrained to cater for a general public which regards satire generally with mistrust and often with blank and utter incomprehension. Our pictorial humorists may make game of the latest feminine extravagance of fashion or of some social fatuity of the moment, but the methods they employ are the strictly literal methods calculated to appeal to the forthright sense of humour of the British general public. If they

"shoot folly as it flies  
And catch the manners living as they rise,"

the follies and manners are usually pretty heavy on the wing and the weapon employed is not infrequently a blunderbuss. The American artist does not wait until folly is on the wing. He stalks it to its very nest and prods it with a rapier. In this way he may be said to "poke fun" at folly. And the rapier with which he pokes it is the sharp and subtle blade of ridicule. King-pin of such American swordsmen is Peter Arno.

The work of our comic artists is innocent of this note of sharp ridicule. This applies even to our cartoonists. Tom Webster can revel over the whole range of the great republic of sport, but always in that essentially generous spirit which characterizes British fun. The result is that his victims, far from feeling the sting of ridicule, appear particularly to enjoy the joke. He can, to use an appropriate term, sweep the floor with a heavyweight boxer, whose only subsequent complaint will be that he is not made the subject of more numerous cartoons. But there is gall in the inkpot of the American cartoonist. This is not necessarily to his discredit. Simply his sense of humour functions that way. For example, anyone who is familiar with the strip-cartoons of royalty by O. Soglow, which appear in the *New Yorker*, will probably agree with me that they are devastatingly funny. But their whole essence is satire.

And if the art of the cartoonist is outside the range of the argument,

let us take the example of another British artist of immense popularity in this country—Mr. H. M. Bateman. Wherein does the Bateman spirit of England differ from the Arno spirit characterizing America?

Mr. Bateman's art generally finds expression in what may be termed the fish-out-of-water subject. He selects an occasion or scene of some deep-rooted national or social formality and introduces the abject figure of the human blot on the traditional copy-book. But however dire may be the immediate results of the guardsman dropping his rifle on parade or of the golfer performing a frantic air-shot on the first tee at St. Andrews, the indiscretion is unintentional and it is the delinquent and not the institution that ultimately suffers. The guardsman is shot at dawn and the parade resumes its prescriptive state. A few elderly golfers shudder round the bar in recollection of that shattering moment of the air-shot, but its perpetrator is banished, we feel, to the outer darkness of some nine-hole nonentity of a meadow course and Scotland stands where it did.

So even if we discern in these priceless pictures a faint suggestion of ridicule aimed at our more pompous institutions, we get the impression that Mr. Bateman is merely discovering for us the funny side of our national solemnities, even as Mr. Webster discovers a joke in the tense ritual of a test-match.

Contrast with these the mentality of Peter Arno. The social foundation itself, as exemplified by its members, is Arno's butt. He specializes in a sardonic and fiendishly subtle attack on the social coterie mustered beneath the sign of the High Hat. Occasionally he turns his sharp attention to some other type of subject—to the Babylonian features of the Atlantic liner—to the blatant incongruities of the film studio. He glimpses the stupendous occasion of Imperial reception by the populace and devastates it far more effectively than by any bomb by causing the mind of Majesty to wander from the magnificence of the business on hand to wayward thoughts of his pants. But as a rule Arno does not wait for his protagonists to engage in any particular public function. He



stalks them into their private lives; he shadows them like a pickpocket in the streets; he sneaks into their boudoirs, their bathrooms, their bedrooms, even into their beds, and prods them in a thousand vulnerable spots with the rapier of his wit. Mr. Bateman's Guards' parade survives the dropped rifle; St. Andrews survives the air-shot; but Peter Arno stabs the high-hatted brigade far more deeply by showing us its individuals in all the crude banalities of the unguarded moment—searching for their socks, out of reach of their bath soap, willingly but lugubriously cuckold, or themselves snapshotted in some preposterous instant of trite informality in the midst of an amour, or of fatigued and material infestivity at its conclusion.

No humorist I can think of displays a keener appreciation of the incongruous or of the subject-value of unconscious humour. Moreover, he realizes with extraordinary perspicacity the importance of the trifle. He tests the great social chain, discovers the weak link and points out the little flaw wherein that weakness lies.

His methods too provide a sharp contrast to those we employ. When we see in an English comic paper the drawing of a lady in conversation with her gardener, we anticipate correctly that the chief humorous value of the thing will be found in the caption—in what the gardener says to the lady. But the whole point of Arno's work is somewhere in the drawing itself; latent, unforeseen perhaps, but there, waiting to be exposed. If we look first at the drawing, we may find it a very funny drawing; but it is only when we read the caption that we appreciate the flash of wit that has inspired it. In England the drawing so often illustrates the joke. In Arno the drawing invariably contains the joke.

This, probably, is what enables Peter Arno to exhibit that pithiness which is so welcome a feature of his art. No need for him to resort to those dire expedients, so familiar to us in this country, whereby the spokesman is identified and (worse) the reasons for his remarks rammed home by irritating little explanatory preliminaries in brackets. If the publication of this volume in England serves to hasten the end of our

"Old Lady (to Gentleman who has remained seated in bus)" formula, it will have provided an additional boon to its admirers.

"It will not surprise me if I hear that certain of these drawings strike quite broad-minded people over here as being unrefined. Personally, I have a comfortable feeling about Peter Arno that he never sets out to be coarse unless the joke on hand demands a measure of coarseness, in which case he simply refuses to flinch from anything at all. I conceive that there is no more original perversity about him in this matter than there is in any highly respected British artist whose inspirations require him to take occasional excursions into the realms of the nude. Rather, one would expect one of Mr. Arno's subjects to explain the situation in some such words as these: 'I am a very refined member of Society and desire to appeal only to persons of equal refinement; but my artist specializes in the unguarded moment, and it is essential to his ends that on this occasion you discover me in my bath.' If this is coarseness, then my own mind must be sadly degraded; but at any rate I am in good company."

But with all said and done Mr. Benchley is quite right. It is really preposterous to try to analyse the Arno spirit, because whatever its general trend it is hopelessly elusive in detail. To review a collection of his drawings and to attempt to make them fit severally into a general purpose, is like tinkering with one of those exasperating puzzles in which one is required to shake little portions of quicksilver into a sort of miniature bagatelle-board. And perhaps, after all, the true test of any type of genius lies in the difficulty of explaining it.

Ben Travers

PETER ARNO'S  
PARADE



"See, darling, I told you we couldn't have a Platonic friendship."



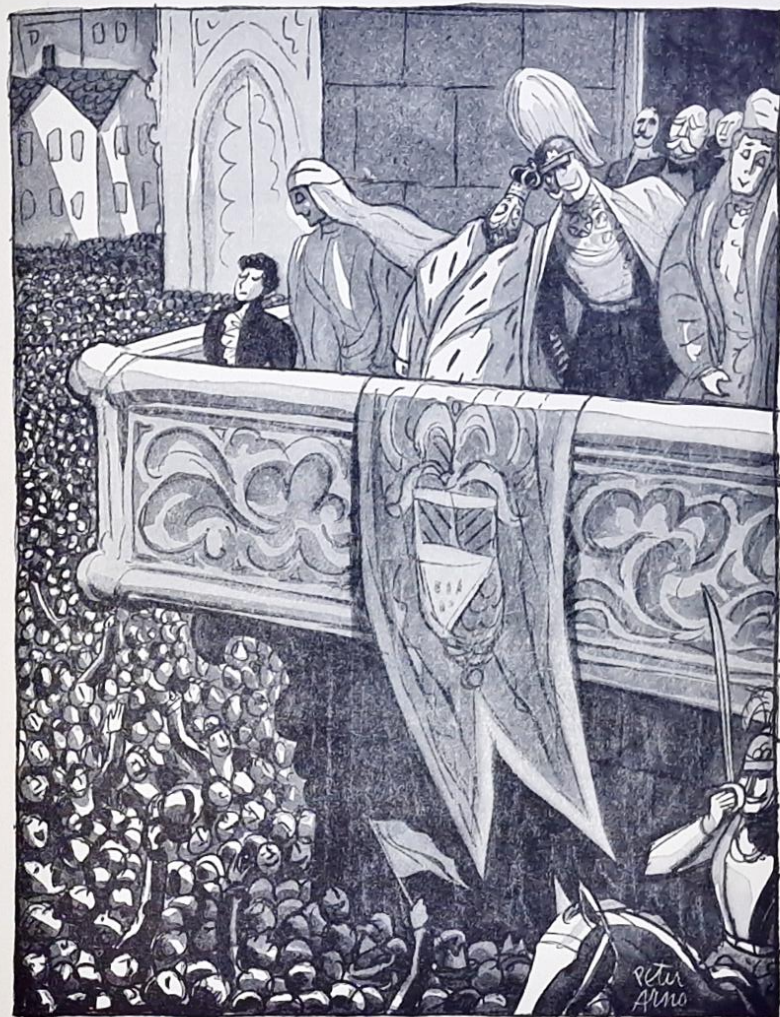
"Have I ever told you about my operation?"



"I'm sorry, ma'am, but this gentleman would like to have another look at the apartment."



"My god! We're out of gin!"



"All I wear under this is my underwear."



"Ella and I certainly appreciate your hospitality, Mrs. Creighton."



"Searle, come quickly. The soap has floated out of reach!"



"You great big man! Where've you been all my life?"  
"Oswego."



"Action! More action! Show him that you love him!"



"Cadwallader *always* comes through."







"Gad! My wife looks terrible to-night!"  
"Sir! You are speaking of the woman I love!"



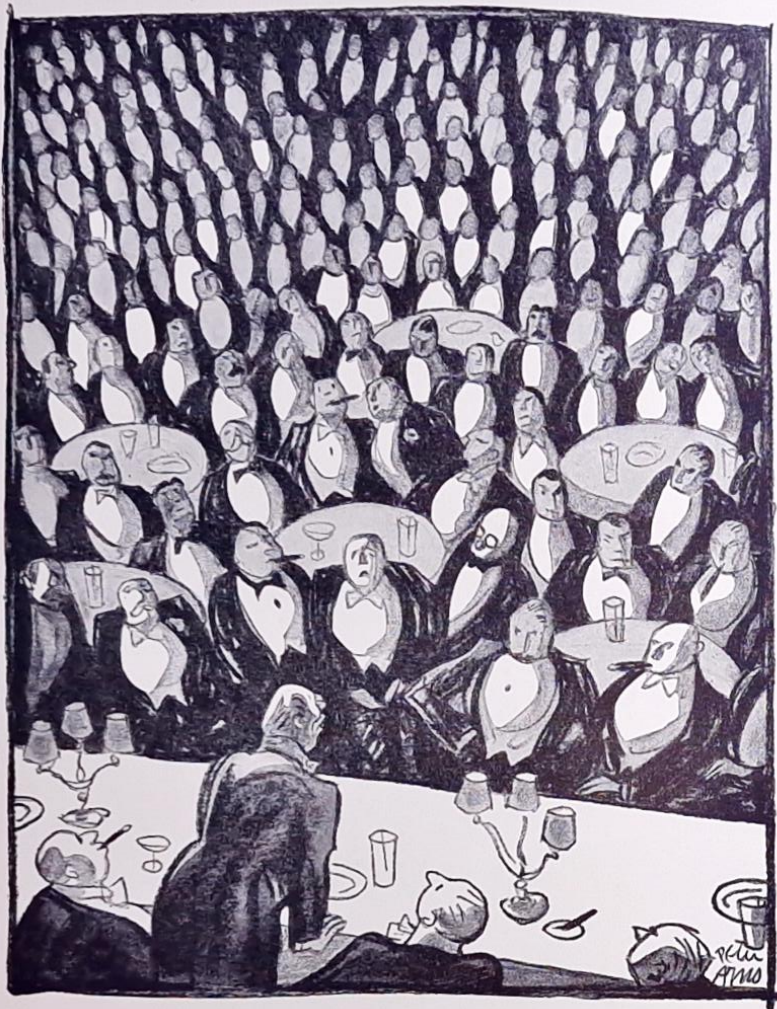
"Er—is that you, Gwendolyn? I believe this is our dance, Gwendolyn."



"By Gad, officer—you'll pay for this!"



"Have you read any good books lately?"



"—and I may tell you, in strictest confidence—"



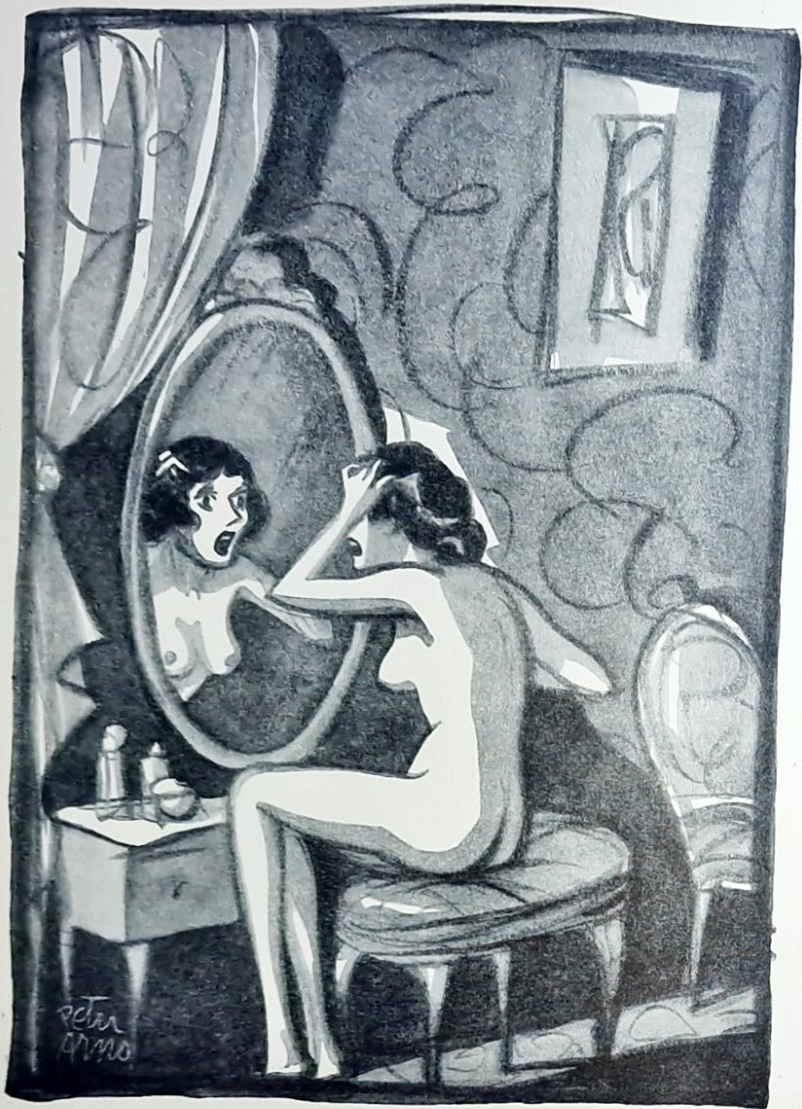
"We want to report a stolen car."



"Do come in again soon. We love to see the old faces."



"—and I consider your conduct unethical and lousey."



"Good God! I forgot to get favors for the men!"



"Did I ever tell you about my experience?"



"Well, make up your mind!"



"Not a very homey boat, is it?"



"No! No! Not that!"



"Feehly pictures?"



"Let's not lose our tempers, sir!"



"Damn this black carpet! I never can find my socks."





"Are you sure you put that damn cat out?"



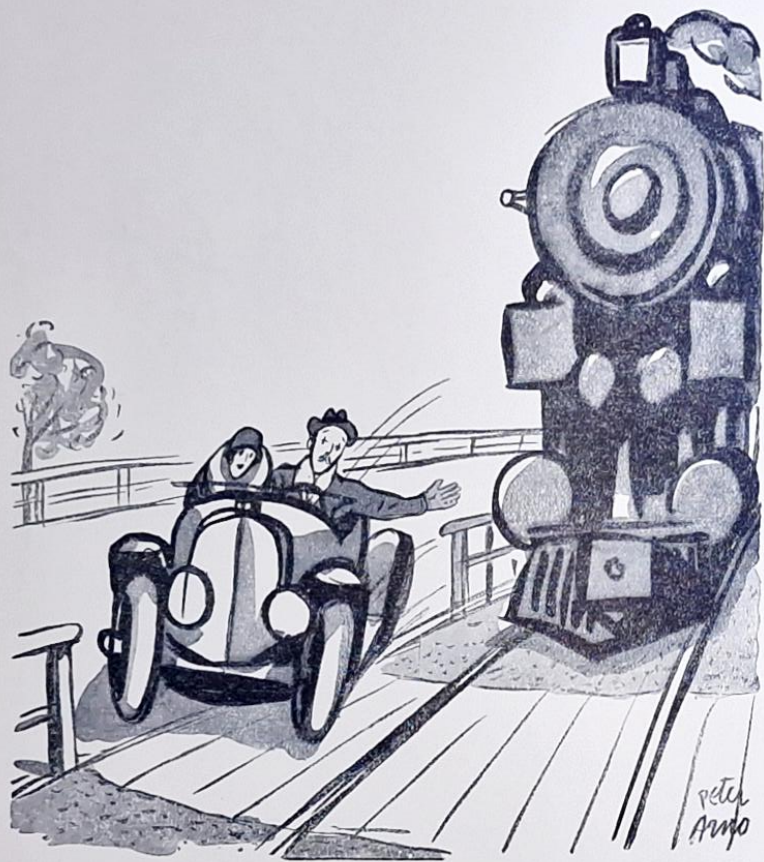
"I sort of lost my temper with this one."



"Boo! You pretty creature!"



"Please, sweetheart, don't spoil my dream!"



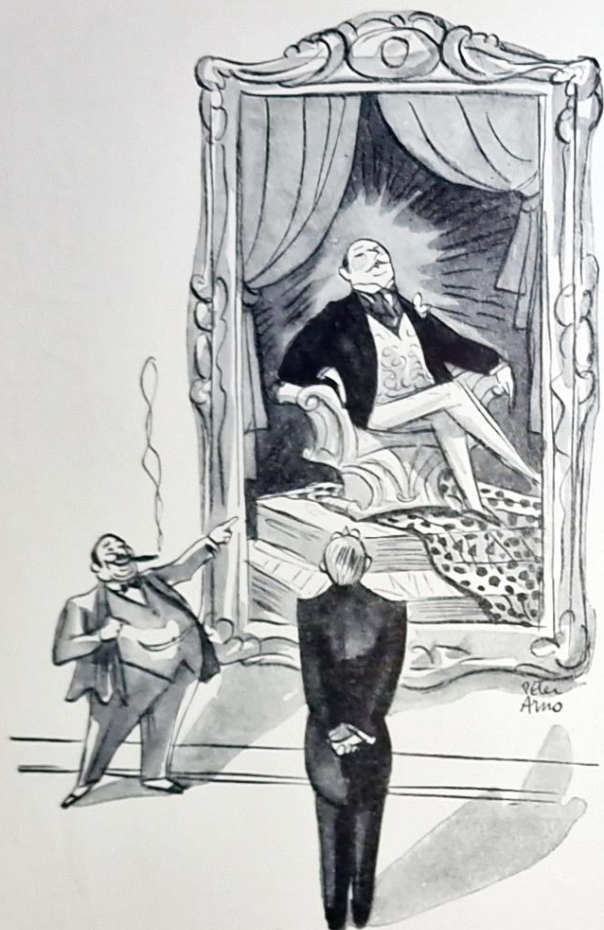
"I just stepped out a minute to get the milk, dear."



"Naturally you write better than I can. You've travelled. You know life."



Theatre party.

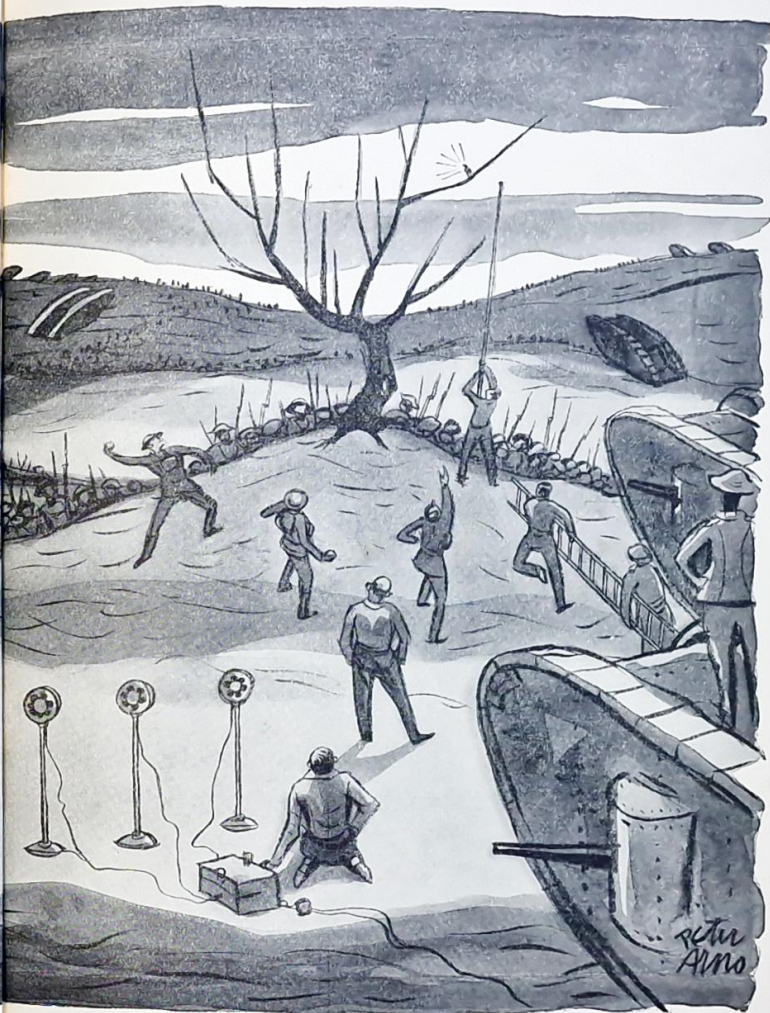


Peter  
Arno

"That's me."



"Why, auntie! You've got your hat on. Are you going out?"



RETNA  
ALMO

"Well, we can't start till we get that robin out of there."



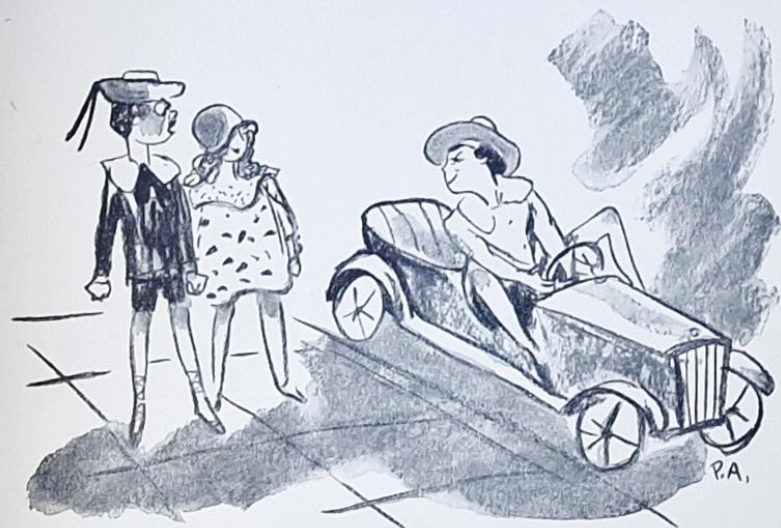
"I don't think you love me any more, Herbert."  
"Yes I do, dear. I'm just not the demonstrative type."



"Now masticate, Ermyne!"



"But we could work out a budget!"



"Don't be a rotter, Farnsworth!"





.... And, fellow members, if I have any thought to leave with you, it is this—"



"Could you direct me to the men's room?"



"Hortense! Hortense! How can you giggle at a moment like this?"



"Don't fret, sir. Madam will be back in a minute."



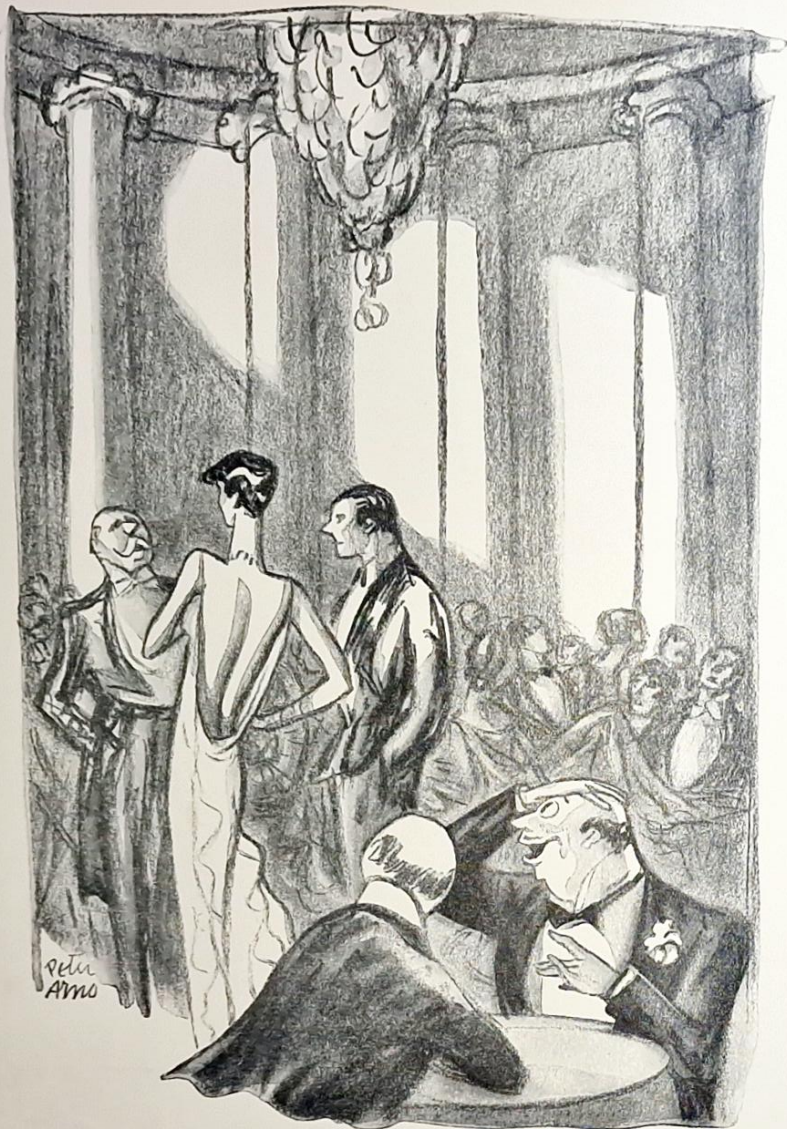
"Gad, it's good to be alive!"



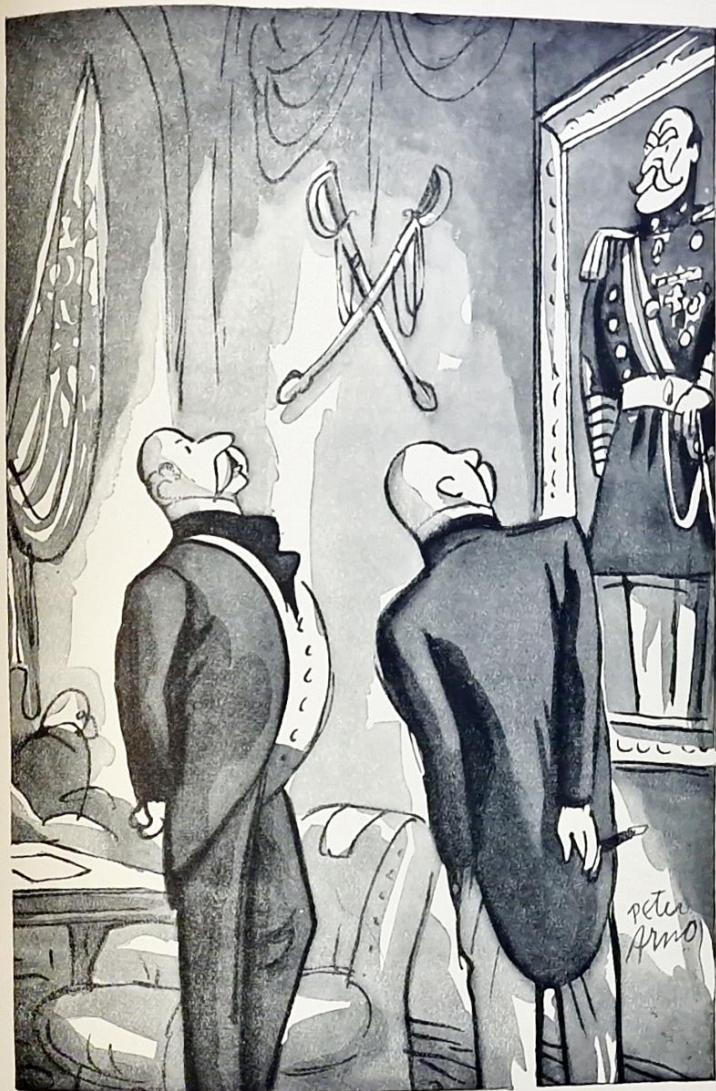
"Fake, ain't it?"



"Er, sorry, Mr. Marchbanks—it isn't quite what we wanted."



"My God—what expression!"

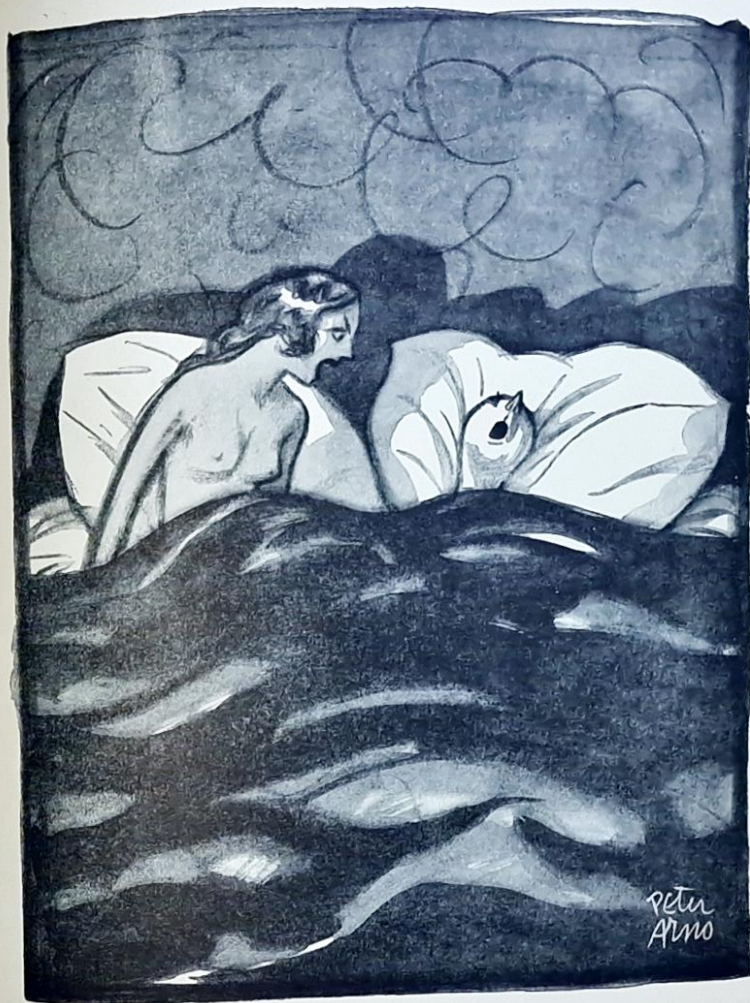


"He fought a beautiful war, sir."



Peter  
Arno

"Don't help me! Don't help me!"



Peter  
Arno

"Wake up, you mutt! We're getting married to-day."



"Darling, here's the bill from the hospital. One more payment and the baby's ours!"



"May I?"



petra  
Arno  
S.S. de Grouse