II

PERIODICA

The printed page was the most important form of mass communication at the turn of the century. Several factors contributed to this growth and power of journalism. The law on the press of 1881 had liberalized freedom of expression by removing the previous restrictions of the censor and this, together with the development of industrial techniques of printing (photomechanical procedures and color printing) and the commercial possibilities, made the period a "golden age" for printed matter. Information, political comment, and publicity were openly and widely diffused: and then, as now, what made many newspapers sell was eroticism, violence, and scandal.

Caricature and press illustration turned to comment and satirize the case of Dreyfus from the beginning; in effect the Affair fed a machinery which was already in place. Documentary news reports and illustration were already well-established in France, and visual political satire had been a feature of journalistic discourse since the Revolution. While the "reportage" of Le Petit Journal fixed the horror of Dreyfus's degradation in the minds of the French public on its front cover in January 1895, the caricaturists of La Libre Parole harped on the grotesque antisemitic themes that had formed a staple of this organ since its inception several years before. (See P. pj.2; P. lp.24).

But major coverage of the Affair came in the wake of the publication of Zola's "J'Accuse...!" in George Clemenceau's newspaper, L'Aurore, on January 13, 1898. In general, the illustrators and artists followed and joined in movements of opinion: the clearest example is the founding, in response to Zola's accusation, of Psst...! by Forain (the entire series of which is one of the highlights of the collection). This in turn gave occasion for the founding of the dreyfusards' response, Le Siflet, led by Henri-Gabriel Ibels and others. Periodicals of every description turned to the Affair to feed the public imagination with commentary on the events, with portraits of its celebrities as in Léandre's work for Le Rire, or through the most infantile of sentiments expressed in the garish colors of Le Pilori in its campaign against both Dreyfus and Zola. (See P. ri.3; P. pi.2).

1898 was the crucial year when the Affair and the engagement of the press and its illustrators become most visible. Many commentators have suggested that the antidreyfusards were "better" in the sense of being more talented as artists. Forain is praised above all for his graphic concision and his biting wit. Both Bob (also known as Gyp, in fact the Comtesse Sybille de Martel Janville, and a reputed novelist) and Caran d'Ache were clearly superlative artists and cartoonists who were able to translate varied passions and ideas into line. All of these were outspoken antisemites and antidreyfusards—and were by no means alone. There were however many artists who took up the challenge: Hermann-Paul, Couturier, and others mounted a counter-attack against the wave of violent diatribe directed against the dreyfusards principals, although it may still be conjectured that the fire of the essentially negative commentary mounted by the antidreyfusards was in some sense more facile of conception, within the parameters of the reductive and frequently destructive ambitions of caricature.

Items in the collection which trace the outpourings of artists and writers during the period in their response to the Affair also include the sober compilations of imagery, increasingly photographic, in such liberal organs as L'Illustration and La Vie Illustrée. (See P. vi.1). The work of a host of documentary artists, editors, and photographers, along with their colleagues in the foreign press (e.g. the Dutch Wereldkroniek and the Graphic [England]) offered their contemporaries and history a rich iconographical source of information and opinion regarding the "Trial of the Century."