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comics generally on sale. "A person looking for harm in English comics is the kind of person who sees evil in everybody," he said. They filled a definite place in the development of the child's reading habits. Sales of comics were, in his opinion, as high as ever. Some parents deposited a sum of money with the instruction that he should supply them with up to six or nine comics a week for their children, at his own choice. He considered that a *Classic Comic* did not spoil the literary value of the book itself for the child and, linking comics with the cinema, said there was nothing to educate the child like a picture on the screen. He thought the present boom in comic sales might be partly due to the fact that there was "more money around to-day," and that many children were more precocious and determined to get their "ten bob's worth."

### Is the Standard Improving?

A prominent education authority with whom we discussed the subject expressed the opinion that comics were harmful in effect because they were mass-produced and aimed at a standardised age-level which must necessarily be fairly low. Yet he thought that in recent years the makers of comics had been gradually raising the age-level aimed at. This seemed to indicate that they were aware of this aspect of their work. Comics of the *Chick's Own* type, which aimed at the lowest reading age, fulfilled a definite function because a child must have fantasy, to be able to escape from reality and picture himself as doing great things in the world. Nevertheless this fantasy could be better produced by works of a less standardised nature. *Classic Comics* were bad because they were, in fact, just making a comic-strip out of a work of literature, and were standardised like all comics. Of the *Brick Bradford* type he said that they did emphasise a certain moral aspect in that the "goodies" always defeated the "baddies." This applied also to the many adventure or mystery stories in English comics such as the *Champion*. When asked if comics had any effect on the child's social attitudes or thinking, whether for instance they inculcated an anti-democratic or Fascist state of mind—the attitude that "might is right"—he said there was no way of proving their effect harmful or not until we had some way of measuring this effect on the children. This was not yet possible. Questioned as to the educative value of comics, he instanced the case of a teacher in an American Junior High School who used comic strips as a basis for imaginative and creative work such as writing a story illustrated with pictures. His own attitude, however, was that education should try, much as the libraries were doing, to "beat comics on their own ground" with better and brighter editions of children's books.

### English Comics Are Conservative

Representatives of a firm which distributes comics in New Zealand told us that the American comics had been in circulation for some years, but that they had been given a boost during the war years because supplies of English comics were restricted, while Australian and New Zealand firms obtained the printing rights of the American types. Though they could sell during the war all the English comics they obtained, they were now faced with a certain surplus. There were several explanations for this, in his opinion. One

of the principal ones was that the English comics were still persisting with the same kind of story which had been popular 40 years ago. (For example, the Bruin Boys, Marzipan the Magician, Tiger Tim). Times had changed since the war, and children had a greater desire for the kind of adventure featured in American comics. They were produced in brighter colours and with a more attractive layout. This could be seen reflected in the English comics, too, as they featured fewer of the familiar school stories and more of an adventurous type. As an English critic, George Orwell, said in 1939: "These papers exist because of a specialised demand, because children at certain ages find it necessary to read about Martians, death-rays, grizzly bears, and gangsters."

Another reason was, of course, that there were now much greater supplies of English comics than was the case a few years ago.

### Positive Approach Needed

A teacher who had studied the problem both in his professional capacity and as a parent said that, since children love comics and will always read them, we need to have as good comics as possible. He considered most comics to have a "sensational, monotonous story, to be poorly illustrated, and of a doubtful moral flavour"—to be, in fact, "often quite objectionable." The central problem was then one of discrimination and taste—discrimination amongst comics in order to get the children to discriminate against them after the age of, say, twelve. Beyond this age comics should not be read. The problem of the teacher and parent was to wean children from comics to books. A positive approach was needed rather than the negative one of prohibition. He was in favour of *Classic Comics* and quoted the case of a boy aged 14, who, after reading the classic comic *Moby Dick*, expended a considerable sum of his own money on buying the book itself. In some instances the comic tends to have the same spirit as the book, even to the language and dress, in the case of a historical novel like *Ivanhoe*. He concluded that comics as a whole can be an approach to literature provided there is a positive attitude on the part of parents and teachers.

### FORSTER'S INDIA

"THEN Azziz shouted: 'India shall be a nation.' No foreigners of any sort! Hindu and Moslem and Sikh and all shall be one! Hurrah! Hurrah for India! Hurrah! Hurrah!"—this quotation, from the last page of *A Passage to India* (1924) is typical of E. M. Forster's emphasis on the supreme importance of human relationships, on the necessity for all classes and conditions of men to live together in harmony. And it is the philosophy behind his books (described once as a "semi-pagan humanism"), rather than his style or any technical feature of his work, that has caused him to be regarded as one of the greatest living novelists. Canterbury listeners will have the opportunity to hear more about Forster and his place in the development of the English novel from 3YA on Sunday, September 21, at 4.15 p.m.



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