

Two Kinds of Comic

THERE was a time when comics were funny and meant to be, but most parents would agree that nowadays many of them are no joke at all. When did the old-fashioned comic begin—when was Tiger Tim born?—and when did we enter the era of the slayer and the spaceman? Which comic characters appeal most to young readers, and what do boys and girls think about the American-type comic, which was the G.I.'s chief reading matter during the war and has caused so much concern to parents and others. Two BBC programmes which seek to answer these and many other questions have now started on the rounds of National stations. The first, *Dear Boys and Girls*, will be heard from 4YC at 7.0 p.m. on Tuesday, November 16 (repeating from 4YA the following Sunday), and 2YC at 8.48 p.m. on Sunday, November 21 (repeating from 2YA the following Sunday).

This first programme is about the origin and characterisation of "nursery"

... AND JUST ONE MORE

AS the BBC programmes described here show, there are comics and comics. One good way of helping to get rid of the more absurd kinds is to laugh at them, Superman and space women, like all impostors, are sensitive to ridicule. Could they survive the leg-pulling which is one of the more engaging features of life in New Zealand? Could they come down from their high places and settle in the suburbs? Our artist and his collaborator, asking these questions, found themselves committed to an exercise in pictorial satire. The results are to be seen on pages 10-11.



"When did the old-fashioned comic begin—when was Tiger Tim born?"

comics. In gathering the material for it Jennifer Wayne, who wrote and produced both programmes, talked with the editor, writers and artists of a popular comic paper; and at the British Museum she pored over bound volumes of old comics and spent hours renewing nostalgic contacts with childhood favourites. One of the facts she reveals is that today at

least 400,000,000 comics are printed every year in Britain alone, and that the annual cash turnover in retail comics in Britain is reckoned to be something like £5,000,000.

Slayers and Spacemen, the second programme, explains how modern American comics were introduced to readers in Britain, and how they differ in appeal from the English juvenile comic. It covers three main types of story—crime, science-fiction and fantasy-horror—and ends with a summary of the views of 1600 British boys and girls on these comics. The author's conclusion is that there are plenty of good comics as well as bad.

The narrator of these programmes is Marjorie Westbury, and music for them was specially composed by Antony Hopkins.

New BBC Edition of "Alice"

WHEN *Alice in Wonderland* was first published in 1865, the staid critical journal *The Athenaeum* found it a "stiff, over-wrought story," but millions of readers have since delighted in the book's comical absurdities and delicate, fanciful fun. Lewis Carroll's famous story has been broadcast by the BBC at regular intervals during the past 20 years, and the latest production of the five-part serial is the second to be issued as a transcription. It is currently being

heard in 2YA's *Children's Session* (at 5.15 p.m. on Thursdays), and will be broadcast from the other YA and YZ stations in coming weeks.

Hitherto the part of Alice has always been played by a child, but this time it is taken by a grown-up, Patricia Field. The rest of the cast includes some of the best-known names in British radio: Wilfred Babbage, Frank Birch, Vivienne Chatterton, Harry Hutchinson, Stephen Jack, Mary O'Farrell, Bryan Powley, Marjorie Westbury, and Fred Yule. David Davis, who is the storyteller, also plays the incidental piano music, which includes Richard Addinsell's charming "A Boat Beneath a Summer Sky," which was originally written for a stage version of *Alice*. David Davis has also set two of the rhymes to his own music—"The Lobster Quadrille" and "Soup of the Evening, Beautiful Soup."

David Davis is Head of the BBC Children's Hour, and he is known to countless youngsters in Britain as simply "David." He considers *Alice in Wonderland* to be one of the most successful stories ever broadcast by the BBC for younger children.

Lewis Carroll, in real life the Reverend Charles Dodgson, was an Oxford don, author, mathematician, and one of the first notable amateur photographers. He was born in 1832 and died in 1898. The original Alice, who later became Mrs. Reginald Hargreaves, first heard the story from Mr. Dodgson during a river excursion in 1862 when she was ten. Later, he gave the little girl a laboriously-written 92-page book with 37 pen and ink drawings which formed the basis of the now famous Tenniel



ALICE AND THE DUCHESS—from the original drawing by Sir John Tenniel



BBC photograph

DAVID DAVIS

illustrations. Mr. Dodgson's original manuscript was sold at Sotheby's, the famous book auction rooms, for £15,400 in 1928—at the time a record price for a British book. The manuscript included with it six autographed letters from the author. Later it was sold in America, with two other copies, for over £30,000. Eventually the original manuscript was presented by a "group of well-wishers in the U.S.A." to the British Museum, where visitors to London may now see it.

Incidentally, Lewis Carroll's first title for the book was *Alice's Adventures Under Ground*.

Mrs. Hargreaves died in 1934 at the age of 82, but Alice lives on, ever a child and ever adorable.

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