

CONCERN OVER COMICS

A KORERO Report

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IN 1897 comics, or "funnies," began to appear in United States newspapers.

Now, forty-eight years later, Americans can point with pride to the following achievements:—

A monument to Popeye has been erected in the spinach-growing area of Texas.

When Little Orphan Annie's dog was lost, Annie's creator received a telegram from Henry Ford.

The Captain Marvel Club has 573,119 members, of whom more than 30,000 fans write to the Captain each year.

The death of Raven in "Terry and the Pirates" brought 14,000 letters of sympathy, as well as wreaths.

In more than 2,500 class-rooms children learn to read from "Superman" work books.

Every month 20,000,000 copies of comic books are sold to American boys and girls. Comic books are read regularly by 70,000,000 children and adults, and comic personalities sell breakfast foods and bonds, and recruit blood donors.

That's what happened in the United States, original home of the comics. From small newspaper strips, the comic concern swiftly developed into a great industry employing hundreds of artists working in shifts, hammering out cartoon after cartoon, mass producing wistful orphans, funny bunnies, gunmen, supermen, pirates, precocious children, crazy cats, monsters, robbers, vandals, rogues, highwaymen. Of these creations, few, indeed, fail to emphasize fist fights, quarrels, despair, deception, fright, thefts, torture, death, and murder.

It wasn't long before Uncle Sam's syndicate salesmen succeeded in establishing overseas markets, first in England, then in Germany, next in France, and, for a brief period, in Italy

until the Fascists banned these "foreign strips," and insisted upon features of "an all-Italian variety."

Maybe some years ago you could have said to yourself, well that suits me, that's their business. But now go to any New Zealand bookstall, examine any child's treasured pile of comics, and you'll find predominating over all others is the American comic, with American slang, with American slants on life and living (no matter how remote), and the plodding, old theme of fist-fights, quarrels, death, murder, &c.

These comics appear to have no political chopper to grind, no message (either sinister or constructive) to convey to children. But their absolute unreality gives a child no encouragement to think for himself, to learn about the world and its problems, to form any outlook on life except that adventure, thrills, and causes worth dying for happen at the ends of the earth, in deserts and on the moon—in fact, anywhere except where real life itself is to be found.

What can we do about it?

To begin with, no trained investigator yet has determined scientifically the effect, either for good or for evil, of comics upon the children of our country. Observations and surveys by the Education Department show the New Zealand youth generally belongs to the vigorous, outdoor group of children who spend comparatively little leisure time in cinemas. They read more than any other children in the world. The standard of their reading matter is higher than that of English children, and probably far superior to that of similar age-groups in the U.S.A. Yet in the field of "yellow" comics, the concern is not how much the child believes at the time of reading, but how much belief *remains* in his mind.