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THE COMICS...VERY FUNNY!

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old participant in a holdup with a fatal shooting. There are recent cases where young men branded girls' breasts with burning cigarettes and carved initials into their flesh with a knife. A thirteen-year-old boy in Chicago has just murdered a young playmate. He told his lawyer, Samuel J. Andalman, that he reads all the crime comic books he can get hold of. He has evidently not kept up with the theories that comic-book readers never imitate what they read. He has just been sentenced to twenty-two years in jail; while the comic-book publishers who killed his mind with thoughts and methods of murder, and their experts who say his reading was good for him, continue as before.

All these manifestations of brutality, cruelty, and violence and the manner in which they are committed—that is the folklore of the comic books.

Comic books are the greatest book publishing success in history and the greatest mass influence on children. If I make the most conservative estimate from my own researches, one billion times a year a child sits down and reads a comic book. Crime does not pay, but crime comics do.

Recently I walked in one of the crowded sections of New York City and saw a sign: "Saturday Morning [which is the Saturday matinee for children] Comic Books Will Be Given Out Free to the First 500 Attending." I looked to see what was playing in that movie that morning. There were two horror films: "The Son of Frankenstein" and "The Bride of Frankenstein." The posters calling attention to the movies showed girls in various stages of being overpowered. The movie was called the Ritz. As I stood there I was reminded of the story of the little boy who was asked what he wanted to be when he grew up and replied enthusiastically: "I want to be a sex maniac!"

There are two opinions about comic books. The one says they are very harmful to children; the other says they are good for the little kiddies. John Mason Brown has called comic books the "marijuana of the nursery." The question can be put this way: Are comic books the marijuana of the nursery or the penicillin of a happy childhood? This difference of opinion is reflected also in the conflict in the child's mind. Briefly summarized, it is a conflict between super-ego and submachine gun.

What is the case *for* the comic books? Seventeen points are adduced in favor of them. It is said:

1) That the children have their "own choice" in selecting this literature. (Go to any candystore or newsstand, and see what other books you can get for ten cents. The children are bombarded with at least sixty million comic books a month. That is seven hundred and twenty million of them a year. As far as their free choice is concerned, in a Chicago school recently the pupils collected and burned all the comic books and then went around in groups and persuaded the dealers in that neighborhood not to handle them any more. Other schools in Chicago followed their example.)

2) That they reflect the children's minds and if there is something wrong with them it must be the child's fault and the child must have been neurotic or disturbed or unstable in the first place. (That reminds me of the owner of the dog that had killed a rabbit, who claimed in court that the rabbit had started the fight.)

3) That it is good for children to find release for their aggressive desires. (Is there one sentence in Freud to indicate that it is advisable for children to see over and over again pictures of violence and torture?)

4) That they are educational. (Let's look at one of the much-vaunted "good" comic books again, for an example, those "good" comic books used as window-dressing for the whole industry. It would seem that no better choice could be made than the comic-book version of the novel by Charles Dickens: "Great Expectations." The first nine pictures of this "educational" book show a gruesome, evil-looking man threatening a little boy with a big knife, and in one picture the little boy is crying out: "Oh, don't cut my throat, sir!" Is this Charles Dickens speaking, or is it the circulation manager of a comic-book publishing firm?

(As for the claim that comic books lead children to read the classics, many children whose confidence I have gained have told me that when they have to make a book report in school they use the comic-book version for their report so that they *won't* have to read the book.)

5) That there are good comic books. (That reminds me of the story of the polite clergyman who was asked about a bad egg which he had just started

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