

## *The Comics . . . Very Funny!*

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**A**N ANXIOUS mother consulted me some time ago. Her four-year-old daughter is the only little girl in the apartment house where they live. The boys in the building, from about three to nine years old, hit her, beat her with guns, tie her up with rope whenever they get a chance. They hit her with whips which they buy at the circus. They push her off her bicycle and take her toys away. They handcuff her with handcuffs bought with coupons from comic books. They take her to a vacant lot and use her as a target for bow and arrow. They make a spearhead and scare her. Once, surrounding her in this way, they pulled off her panties to torture her (as they put it). Now her mother has fastened the child's panties with a string around her neck so the boys can't pull them down.

What is the common denominator of all this? Is this the "natural aggression" of little boys? Is it the manifestation of the sex instinct? Is it the release of natural tendencies or the imitation of unnatural ones? The common denominator is comic books.

I examine in the clinic a boy of eleven, referred because he fights in school and is inattentive. He says:

I buy comic books every week. They kill animals, sometimes they kill people. One of the girls is the best fighter. Sometimes they tie her up and sometimes they put her in a snake cave so that the snakes would kill her.

I examine a boy of fourteen referred to the clinic for stealing. I ask him: "Do you think your stealing had anything to do with the comic books?" He answers: "Oh, no. In the comic books it is mostly murder." This is like the arguments used by the experts under subsidy from the comic-book industry.

A boy of seventeen is referred to me by the Juvenile Aid Bureau because in an argument he stabbed a boy of thirteen in the right arm "with full intent." He says: "I don't read many comic books—only about ten a week.

I like crime comics. Sometimes they kill the girl. In one of the books the girl wanted more money so they stabbed her in the back." Was it "full intent," or was it perhaps imitation that motivated him in his own actions?

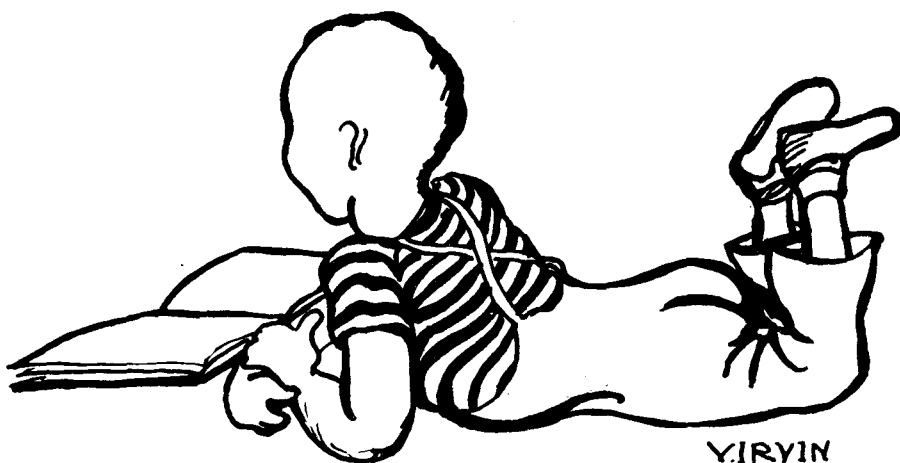
A boy of thirteen is a problem at home and at school. He is a real comic-book addict. He says: "They have some kind of guns that shoot out a ray and kill a lot of people." Is that a natural fantasy? Is that a penis symbol? Or is it a kind of reality that a lot of adults dread now and which these kids will have to face sooner or later?

A boy of fifteen took a boy of twelve up a fire escape and threatened to push him down if he didn't give him a quarter. He says: "I read two comic books a day." A thirteen-year-old boy is referred to me by the State Charities Aid Association. He was caught stealing five dollars. When asked why he took it he confided to me that the older boys in school got up a gang and threatened him. If he did not get them the money they would beat him up. So he stole the money and gave it to them. (I verified this later.)

The experts of the comic-book industry tell us that what the children read in comic books is pure fantasy. But when I examine these many children and adolescents who tell me what they read in comic books, I ask myself with Bernardo in "Hamlet":

"Is not this something more than fantasy?"

**T**HINK of the many recent violent crimes committed by young boys and girls. A twelve-year-old boy who kills his younger sister; a twelve-year-old boy who kills his older sister; a thirteen-year-old burglar who operates with a shotgun; a seventeen-year-old boy who kills a thirteen-year-old boy and leaves a note signed "The Devil"; a public school in New York City where two police officers circulate on the grounds and in the corridors to prevent violence; a mathematics teacher who has to give examinations with a policeman present in the classroom; a thirteen-year-old who shot a nurse and was sent to a reformatory (where, incidentally, he will read more comic books); a gang of adolescent bandits led by a fifteen-year-old girl; two twelve-year-old boys and one of eleven stopping a man on the street and shooting him with a semi-automatic; a fifteen-year-old boy third-degreed as a suspect in a murder case; three sixteen-year-old boys killing a fourteen-year-old "for revenge"; a New York City school where the older pupils threaten the younger ones with violence and with maiming them, robbing them of their money, watches, and fountain pens. The young victims don't dare tell the names of their tormentors. When two



of them were asked by a teacher, they refused to answer: "We don't want our eyes cut out." Actually one sixteen-year-old boy in this school was beaten with a broken bottle from behind and cut so severely that seven stitches had to be taken around his eyes. Adults are horrified at this attack. They don't know that this is old stuff for comic-book readers. In one of the "good" comic books ("Classics Illustrated") in a rendering of the novel by Eugene Sue, "The Mysteries of Paris," there is a picture of a man tied down in a chair—a man whose eyes have been gouged out and whose blood runs down from beneath the bandage.

A twenty-year-old youth in New York City has just killed a policeman. Is that so astonishing when he can see anywhere a typical comic-book cover showing a man and a woman shooting it out with the police to the accompaniment of these words: "We'll give those flatfeet a bellyful of lead"? A nineteen-year-old youth has just been sentenced to the electric chair for the murder of a girl of fifteen, despite the jury's recommendation of clemency, by a judge who had previously disregarded a recommendation of mercy in the case of a sixteen-year-

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## "Marijuana of the Nursery"



—"Jo-Jo Congo King," Fox Feature Syndicate, Inc.

"Apologists for comic books . . . all agree that over-stimulation of fantasy with scenes of sex and violence is completely harmless . . .



—"Jo-Jo Congo King," Fox Feature Syndicate, Inc.

. . . that they are educational . . . children don't imitate them."



—"True Crime Comics," Magazine Village, Inc.

This picture was introduced for the defense in the case against Creative Age Press, charged with violating the Penal Code in publishing "The Gilded Hearse." Dr. Wertham argued that censorship of literature for adults is unnecessary—for children, mandatory, but ignored.



**The War.** In *"War As I Knew It,"* General Patton wrote: "In forty hours I shall be in battle, with little information, and on the spur of the moment will have to make most momentous decisions, but I believe that one's spirit enlarges with responsibility and that, with God's help, I shall make them and make them right. It seems that my whole life has been pointed to this moment." Patton was a professional soldier, one of a long line of honest, hard-working, brilliant American commanders like Winfield Scott, Robert E. Lee, and General Stilwell, whose "Papers" are reviewed below. Deploing the resort to war, they pursued it as a duty with vigor and imagination, and would have agreed with Patton's saying—which can be applied most fittingly to General Stilwell—that "the acid test of battle brings out the pure metal."

## "Vinegar Joe's" Brief

**THE STILWELL PAPERS.** Edited and arranged by Theodore H. White. New York: William Sloane Assoc. 1948. 354 pp. \$4.

Reviewed by JOHN P. MARQUAND

THE LEADERS of World War II and of its aftermath are already filing their briefs before the bar of history. The memoirs of the Honorable Cordell Hull have but recently been published, and the Honorable James Byrnes has spoken frankly about Russia. The personally supervised biography of the Honorable Henry Stimson has already appeared. The papers of the late Henry Hopkins will soon be in the printers' hands, and Mr. Churchill has now completed Volume I of his war and prewar narrative. Admiral Halsey has written his report and the Eisenhower autobiography is about to go to press. Many truths lie just around the corner, but in all this impressive array of high-echelon confessions there will surely be nothing comparable in form of frankness to the acerbate and profane "The Stilwell Papers"—a collection of fragmentary notes, memoranda, and letters left by the late General "Vinegar" Joe Stilwell, the great figure of Burma, China, and India and one of the greatest captains in the last war.

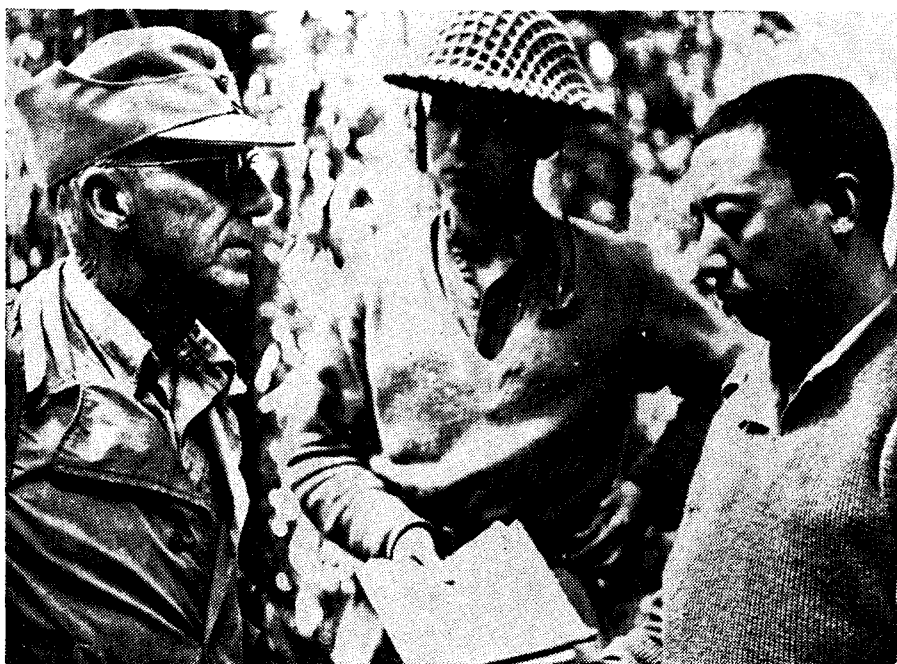
It may also be safe to add that there has never been any memoir just like "The Stilwell Papers" and perhaps there will never be again. Not a line of it was written with an eye on posterity. Not a sentence has been glossed or tempered to outside reactions, because not a page was ever meant to be published. "The Stilwell Papers" are the clear and lonely thoughts of a brave and embittered man of action who never lost his sense of humor. They are couched in scorching GI language. They are without

respect or reverence for very important people. In this regard, General Stilwell has an advantage over most of his high-ranking contemporaries. He does not need to concern himself over hurt feelings or repercussions. He is already dead.

I never met General Stilwell but I once slept for several nights in his quarters in the hotel at New Delhi reserved for officers of the armed forces of the United States. The General was not in New Delhi and one gathered that he stopped there as little as possible. There was not much in New Delhi to help him. But even so his personality was stamped on everything. It was reflected in the polite but hurt bewilderment of American and British staff officers who could not understand why the Gen-

eral seldom used his staff facilities but preferred to consult a few scraps of paper in his pockets and to commune with his own thoughts as he commuted over the Hump. Another side of the General was exhibited in the admiration of certain line officers who had followed him through the disastrous retreat from Burma and who were currently engaged in training his Chinese troops at Ramgarh. His personality was clouded by the usual rumor and gossip. Few were in a position to know what he was doing or trying to do and many of those who did seemed secretly to believe that his mission was hopeless. The climate was terrible, the cooperation of the British was half-hearted for a variety of reasons, many of which were based on the political instability of India herself. Even the ultimate function of the Americans in the theatre was bewildering. On the other side of the Hump, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and his Nationalist Government were reluctant, too, and few except General Stilwell seemed anxious to knife through the Burma jungles and fight the Japanese on the ground. Few saw how anything could be accomplished with the supplies on hand. The China-Burma-India theatre was at the end of the line. There was not enough of anything except prickly heat and dysentery.

This is a mild picture of a scene which General Stilwell dominated through the worst years of the war. It would be impossible to exaggerate the intrigues, the conflicts of personality, and the difficulty of translating any decision into action. General Stilwell stood in the midst of Chinese



"General Stilwell hated the abysmal incompetence, timidity, and corruption of Chinese generals and officials but his scorn never descended to the Chinese troops or people."