

PSYCHOLOGY

Cause of Delinquency

Senate Committee receives opinions from two psychologists that even lurid, sensational comic books are not significant contributing factor to juvenile delinquency.

► COMIC BOOKS, even the lurid, sensational "horror" and "terror" comics, are of insignificant importance as a contributor to juvenile delinquency.

This was the reply of Dr. Carl H. Rush Jr., executive assistant of the American Psychological Association, to an inquiry by the Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency. The subcommittee is concerned only with the sensational and violent type of comic book.

There are many factors that might influence juvenile delinquency, such as housing conditions, emotional adjustment, relations with other members of the family. When compared with these influences, the reading of comic books is quite insignificant, Dr. Rush indicated.

Some of the comic books sold to children are gruesome and horrifying, but if they are to be condemned for that it is also necessary to question the suitability of the favorite nursery tales of Anderson, Grimm and even Walt Disney, he pointed out.

The horror comic books do not originate criminal behavior in children, although they may teach techniques of committing crimes or avoiding detection, Dr. Robert H. Felix, director of the National Institute of Mental Health, told the committee.

In a way, the horror comics may do some good, Dr. Felix indicated. Children may use phantasy, as stimulated by the "comics," as a means of working out natural feelings of aggressiveness, but there are other ways of doing this, such as competitive games, and the child should not rely exclusively on the comics.

The disturbed child, he pointed out, may have a greater tendency to read the lurid type of comics, and the wise parent or teacher may be able to tell from the child's choices of comics some of the mental problems the child is facing. If the child wants to read nothing but the crime, horror type of comic, the parent has cause to worry about his mental health. The choice of reading is thus a symptom rather than a cause of the child's problems.

Both Dr. Rush and Dr. Felix stressed that very little research has been done on this subject, so that scientists do not yet know enough about the effect of this kind of reading on either normal or emotionally disturbed children.

Dr. Rush said that research was "sorely needed" to investigate juvenile delinquency as a developmental problem, with studies being followed up over a period of years.

It is imperative, he said, that this research "be placed in a broad context, one in which the influence of comic books is but one

aspect of a larger program which has as its objective the determination of the multiple causes of juvenile delinquency."

Science News Letter, May 1, 1954

PALEONTOLOGY

Life on Earth at Least 2,500,000,000 Years Ago

► THE CREATION of life upon earth occurred at least 2,500,000,000 years ago, a mere billion years after the solid crust of the earth was formed in the course of the evolution of the planet.

Discovery of carbon of living origin in Canadian slates dating from the early pre-Cambrian geologic era is announced in *Science* (April 16) by Dr. Kalervo Rankama of the University of Helsinki's Institute of Geology.

Clue to the live origin of carbon extracted from the ancient rocks is contained in the ratio of isotopes, carbon-12 and carbon-13, contained in the rocks.

In 1948 Dr. Rankama reported what was

then regarded as the most ancient proof of the existence of life upon earth. This was a pre-Cambrian fossil, *Corycium*, with an estimated age of 1,500,000,000 years. The ancient carbon now reported to be 2,550,000,000 years old cannot be assigned to any particular kind of living matter, although the isotope ratio indicates that it is of biogenic origin.

Conditions probably were favorable for the creation of life soon after the making of the solid crust of the earth, which is dated as 3,500,000,000 years ago. Analysis of carbonaceous slates from the Canadian Shield area shows that living organisms were in existence about a billion years later.

Science News Letter, May 1, 1954

CHEMISTRY

Find Tiny Triangles On Faces of Diamonds

► TRIANGULAR FIGURES on the face of diamonds, caused by high temperatures, have been discovered by two scientists at the Diamond Research Laboratory at Johannesburg, South Africa.

The new variation of surface etching, which takes the form of trigons or harp-like shapes, is reported in *Nature* (April 17) by J. F. H. Custers and H. R. Simpson.

Simply air, at a temperature of 1,400 degrees Centigrade, was used in producing the new effect. Apparently the very tiny figures had not been observed before.

Science News Letter, May 1, 1954



SOLAR FURNACE—Rays from the sun are collected by an aluminum mirror with a 120-inch diameter and reflected to a focal point five-sixteenths of an inch in diameter in this large Convair solar furnace. With ideal sky conditions, the furnace can develop a temperature of 8500 degrees Fahrenheit.