

CONCERN OVER COMICS

A KORERO Report

"VARGO THE VANDAL" leapt from a black cloud in a green sky, narrowly missing a purple moon inscribed "6d." in yellow. A lavishly hatted and cloaked desperado, henna-hued, with a face resembling (if anything) a sad horse, held back a slaving Alsatian dog. From a distance not exceeding six yards, three sinister figures crouched. The right arm of one of these most evil men had disappeared in a white cloud, from which extended a thin, red line. Presumably, he was firing at the Cloaked Desperado. The outraged Alsatian snarled at a bilious yellow rectangle, one-quarter of an inch away from his nose. The rectangle read: "A 32-page Thrilling Adventure Picture Story."

Shuddering slightly, we turned the cover page of this quality production. Stone the crows! We were spared the glorious technicolour, but the anonymous artist, denied this medium to enliven his tale, had gone the limit in black and white. He'd prepared such a line-up of characters that war criminals seemed saints beside 'em.

Frog-eyed, hooked, battered- or bulbous-nosed, sour, sly and shifty of countenance, they sneered, leered, and jeered at one another—"Gorilla George," "Splayface," "Blackie the Dwarf," "Bent nose," "Jackdaw," and "Lockjaw" (twin brothers in Crime), and eight other atrocities, including the great Vargo himself, a cadaverous hidalgo with sweeping sideboards and moustachio.

The picture-story, in which violence is exceeded only by improbability, spreads over thirty-two pages. Vargo's victims are overcome by "a deadly spray," lured to a boat with a false bottom, delivered in a spiral lift to Vargo's hideout beneath the river, suspended above a shark in a glass tank, handcuffed,

attacked by an Alsatian, clutched by an octopus (in yet another glass tank), shot at, attacked with knives, and drowned.

Yet in spite of his infinite resources, Vargo, eventually trapped, is told by the law: "Keep moving, master mind. There's no stop until we get you behind the bars."

The drawings are deplorable. The paper is poor. Even the spelling is incorrect. "Vargo" and similar stuff is printed in Australia. Another sample of Australian work is "The Camouflaged Code," a Shado McGraw thriller, plus Red Steele's adventures with "The Assassins." In the thirty-two pages of blue and red illustrations, revolvers are flourished twenty-five times, but are fired only in three scenes, twelve uppercuts are delivered, there is one clubbing ("dong!"), one kick in the stomach, and three occasions where a prostrate man is jumped on.

Dialogue:—

"Sock him plenty, he's beating me!"
"Okaze."

"Pocket your pop guns in public, pals. You're Mary, and I'm the little lamb, and I'll follow you wherever you go."

"She says if we send him over the cliff it will be murder."

"Arrh! It's just her old-fashioned idea. Let's get busy."

"Get moving, Shado McGraw, we're going to practise the dead march."

Comics of this type are being read to-day by hundreds, perhaps thousands, of New Zealand school-children. In an investigation around Wellington book-sellers and stationers were found to be fairly well supplied with matter closely resembling "Vargo" and the Shado McGraw thriller. They don't like selling it. But demand has to be met, and