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**"TRUST NOT APPEARANCES":  
ADMONITORY PIECES FROM TWO TENNESSEE  
JUVENILE PERIODICALS OF THE 1850s**

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Between 1855 and 1861, Nashville was the scene of publication of two juvenile periodicals, the purpose of which was to "teach and encourage you to cultivate these excellent virtues—to be good, to honor your parents, to make you intelligent that you may become good, great, happy and useful and therefore honored and respected....The first great step in this whole matter is to teach you to love to read; the second is to provide something useful and entertaining for you to read—good food for little minds."<sup>1</sup> Termed to be "solely devoted to the interests of the Youth of the South,"<sup>2</sup> first the *Children's Book of Choice and Entertaining Reading for the Little Folks at Home*, and after five years, its successor, *Youth's Magazine*, were "frail barks launched upon the troubled waters of the literary ocean"<sup>3</sup> in Nashville and were distributed throughout the Southeast.

*The Children's Book* lasted from January 1855 through April 1860, and was followed for only one year by *Youth's Magazine*. The editors of the former, identified only as "Uncle Robin" and "Aunt Alice," at least twice stated as their purpose the following: "In a few years your dear parents will have passed away, and their places are to be filled by you. You must never forget for a moment that you are to be men and women by and by...and all the cares and anxieties of life will be upon you" (*CB*, 1:27). An additional facet of the magazine's purpose was presented by Aunt Alice, who, in speaking of herself, said: "When she looked far away at the children of the Northern states, she saw them with several pretty monthlies, prepared and published especially and solely to meet their wants; but those of the South and South west, as far as she knew, had not one published for them..." (*CB*, 1:251). Further on she stated (now in the first-person), "...I hope it [the magazine] may effect much good by the instruction it will afford, the lessons of morality it will teach and the love of reading it will produce in the minds of the young..." (*CB*, 1:251).

*The Children's Book* consisted of from thirty-two to forty-eight pages per issue and sold for one dollar per year. Each number had the same, relatively attractive cover—an engraving of a family scene of

parents and at least seven children all reading, listening, writing, or being otherwise engaged in some intellectual pursuit (the father gazing out the rear window through a telescope). The border consisted of balloon-type sketches of important geographical entities such as the Capitol, Niagara Falls, a bridge, and a lighthouse. Superimposed on all this pictorial matter was the title "The Children's Book of Choice and Entertaining Reading for the Little Folks at Home," fashioned in a hodge-podge of lettering styles. At the bottom of this cover page were the editors' names, the date and issue number, and the publisher's name and address.

Subscribers were constantly pressured to help build the circulation of the *Book*. The June 1856 issue urged *parents* to re-subscribe: "if hours and days have been cheered and made happier..., then invite me still to come in among your little ones, to linger by your hearthstone, to gaze into the faces of your dear ones, and to nestle down into their hearts..." (CB, 4:78). In December 1856, the editors begged each reader to secure one new subscription during Christmas week as a New Year's gift to the *Book*, because "we cannot afford new and rich pictures unless we have twice as many subscribers" (CB, 2:256). In September 1857, in "Correspondence" it was stated that, because of so many new subscriptions, eight pages and many new pictures had been added during the year, making the *Book* "larger...in better flesh...the largest child's magazine published in America, known to us" (CB, 3:181). In the April 1858 issue, the editor asked the readers to plan to visit for another year for one dollar for twelve visits: "we intend to make each volume larger and finer than the one before and design to make the next issue prettier and more valuable" (CB, 3:464). "What Changes Four Years Have Brought" noted the increase in the number of illustrations and stated that large engravings cost ten to fifteen dollars, small ones four to five dollars, and that *one book* alone would cost one hundred fifty dollars, but subscribers get twelve issues for only one dollar (CB, 4:476).

Ministers of the gospel were requested to aid in introducing the monthly *Book* to every family of their churches and congregations: "What is being done for the little ones to instill into their young minds a love for their books, for the Bible, for study?" (CB, 2: inside back cover). Sabbath School teachers were also urged to solicit subscriptions from parents, to secure readers of the *Book* in their classes, and to use the *Book* "to vary the monotony of the class book. It would be a most interesting School reader" (CB, 2: inside back cover). Premiums,

consisting of "libraries" (Kriss Kringle's Library, the Little Folk's Library, Parley's Cottage Library, Youth's Pictorial Library, the New Juvenile Library, or the Select Library) of varying numbers of titles, were offered by Graves & Marks to ministers and teachers securing subscriptions to the *Book*.

Few advertisements appeared in the *Book*—usually only those for other publications of Graves & Marks. Early editions carried announcements for Edward H. Fletcher, a New York publisher, about the book *Harry's Vacation*, with excerpts from and recommendations of it; and the back cover of the September 1856 issue gave the List of Juvenile Books sold by Graves & Marks Company.

In the March-April 1860 issue, Uncle George announced the demise of the *Book* and prepared the readers for its successor, *Youth's Magazine*: "The next number will be called the *Youth's Magazine*, and will be much larger and better.... It's too bad but it must be done! Shake hands with the *Book* and bid it good-bye. You will never see its smiling face again. Next month a more pompous one will take its place, but treat it kindly until you become acquainted, and I am sure you will like it" (*CB*, 5:472).

The contents of *Youth's Magazine* were to consist of "forty-eight pages of choice and entertaining reading from the pen of its editors, contributors, and current literature; thus giving the reader 576 pages of a book for a small sum of one dollar....The Magazine will be published for the Youth of the Sunny South, and to them we look for support...A Special Department will be kept up for answering queries relating to the studies, trials, and troubles of youth" (*CB*, 5:472).

In addition there was to be a department devoted to the "little ones," that they too might be taught "early the ways of virtue" (*CB*, 5:472). Thus the magazine was designed to meet all the wants of the family circle. "Father and mother, brothers and sisters, young and old, will find it interesting" (*CB*, 5:472), said the advertisement in the front of each issue. Uncle George once promised that the magazine would be "as interesting as time and money can make it" (*YM*, 1:71). Sample copies were available and a money-back guarantee was offered "because we are positive it will please the most fastidious" (*YM*, 1: inside front cover of each issue). The subscription price was one dollar a year and subscribers were again enjoined to participate actively in acquiring new readers, for "two hundred new subscribers are necessary to cover the expense" (*YM*, 1: inside front cover of each issue).

The cover of *Youth's Magazine* consisted of an engraving of a decorative leafy garland encircling the title, date, and editor's name. A notice in each issue stated that "each number would contain a beautiful electro-plate engraving, numerous wood engravings, as well as four steel-plate engravings during the year" (*YM*, 1: back outside cover of each issue). Some of the illustrations accompanied stories, some explained informational articles, but the majority were of a religious nature. "The Picture Gallery," a regular feature for a time, was a collection of religious pictures designed for "you to memorize these scenes and carry them in your mind to the next world" (*YM*, 1:321).

Bible stories, materials to use in the Sabbath Schools, and many articles relating to natural science, geography, history, music, language, and "the lives of great and illustrious men" filled the pages of these periodicals. In addition, both contained regular features such as Correspondence with young readers; Messages to Parents, Ministers of the Gospel, and Sabbath School Teachers; Puzzles, Games, Enigmas, Charades, and Conundrums, plus a newspaper of current events rewritten to interest children. Interesting and appealing as these pieces may have been to the editors and the subscribers of the 1850s, the most entertaining and arresting for the reader today are the admonitory selections offered solemnly on a miscellany of topics. It is with these pieces that this article deals.

As was noted earlier, an expressed purpose of the *Children's Book* was to teach children to love to read. One of the selections devoted to this purpose, "The Two Soliloquies — the Idle Boy," told of hating books when he was a child and vowing that he would never be troubled with them once he became a man. As a man, however, his cry was "Woe is me for having been such a little fool as a boy!" His friends had all surpassed him in wealth and power because of their love of books (*CB*, 5:337)! In another case the back-cover advertisement stated, "It is better to give [for a Christmas gift] a book that will improve the mind than to spend twice the sum for toys and candy, which only injure your body" (*CB*, 3: back inside cover). In a later issue, in his plea for renewals, the editor said, "Those who have read the *Book* for the past three years are better readers and more intelligent than those who have not.... We have told you about hundreds of things you wouldn't have known about" (*CB*, 3:464).

*Youth's Magazine* was also very fervent in advocating extensive reading for young people, stating: "There are no pleasures within the

reach of mortals, apart from religion and virtue, which tend so much to elevate and satisfy our nature as those connected with a love of reading and the pursuit of knowledge." However, the editor cautioned, "reading is *not* to be confused with the perusal of novels which is now too general to need to be stimulated." He continued by saying that tobacco and whiskey are "not more unfavorable to human happiness and virtue" than that "pernicious literature which passes under the common designation of novels." The relationship he saw between these evils is that "the craving for excitement induced by one, finds intoxication in the other." "Because there are so many books that convey instruction while they please and interest," he argues, "there is little to excuse or even palliate the perverted taste that would reject them in favor of trashy fiction" (*YM*, 1:382).

Some of the notions the editors passed on to their young readers regarding writing are amusing to those of us engaged in the teaching of writing today. Aunt Alice, in her concern to instill good writing habits, stated in one of her "Chats" that she wanted to encourage the children to write and to cultivate in them a commendable taste for writing. She directed them properly to head their papers and always to strive for a clean and well-written sheet. Thoughts must be clearly expressed and the penmanship readable. Particularly she admonished *girls* to learn to spell and to write because, according to her, too few were interested in reading and writing. She cautioned—again especially the girls—to do the puzzles for themselves and not to call immediately to "Ma and Pa" for help, for the object of the games and puzzles was to make them think, to use their brains. She went on to blame teachers for not forcing children to think—only to memorize (*CB*, 5:76).

In September 1860, when "Uncle John" assumed editorship of *Youth's Magazine*, continuing the emphasis on writing, he encouraged the readers to "write about any and every thing that interest you; but write it in prose; don't write poetry.... We do not think this is by any means a useful exercise for young people." He went on to say that "the mere capacity for rhyming is often mistaken for poetic talent.... Now to write *prose* well is certainly a very valuable accomplishment. But even this is not a thing to be forced; it is an acquisition that must be slowly made—a faculty of tardy growth." In writing prose, young people should labor for ideas and should learn to read well, spell correctly, and reason vigorously. With patience and industry and a good teacher; they "will work wonders" and neither "lack thoughts or an

ability to express them" (*YM*, 1:236). In April 1861, in urging subscribers to submit material for publication, the editor commended a young correspondent who had contributed a piece to the current issue for his "judgment and good taste in making his essay short. Brevity and conciseness are the soul of good writing. The style and matter bespeak a measure of capacity which, by assiduous culture, may make the possessor eminent in the walks of literature" (*YM*, 1:573).

The editors of both magazines expressed a keen interest in language study and tried to communicate to their young readers the fascination of words, in such articles as "Words Altered in Meaning over the Years" (*CB*, 5:354); "Significance of Names" (*CB*, 5:380,442); and a verse entitled "Grammar in Rhyme" (*CB*, 2:83), which the children were urged to commit to memory. In an oft-recurring feature called "Improprieties of Speech," constructions discussed and dogmatized upon were "*half of/half a*," *a/an*, *-um/a* Latin plurals, *off/off of*, *let on*, *better/best*, the misuse of *complicity* for *complexion* or *complication*, and two pages devoted to *beside/besides*, determining whether the word is a preposition or an adverb (*CB*, 2:350; 4:156; 5:142). In one letter submitted to *Youth's Magazine's* "Queries and Answers" feature, the question was asked if the editor "believed in dancing and parties." The answer delineating the folly of such worldly diversions led to advice on language also: the avoidance of words like *howdy* or *reckon*, which he described as "lazy usages"—not of their original meanings whatsoever (*YM*, 1:45). In another instance a plea was sent out for "respect for American letters" (*CB*, 2:350) and *like/as* was cited as a "blunder more common in Southern and Middle States than in the North"—as was also the vulgarism of using *don't* in the singular (*CB*, 4:156). One young reader came in for his share of Uncle Robin's instructions on writing when he stated in "Correspondence": "Your little book has instructed me a great deal, and has learnt me how to work out puzzles..." (*CB*, 4:158). Another correspondent was lectured on the shortcomings in his testimony "I am very well pleased with your book, and would like it if it came more regular" (*CB*, 5:76).

In the light of the magazines' attitude toward fiction, it is easy to see why a preponderance of stories and anecdotes was of character-building intent. Usually the titles suffice for the content: "Member of the Try Company" (*YM*, 1:221); "Deeds of Kindness" (*YM*, 1:217); "Don't Be Foolhardy" (*YM*, 1:276); "What Perseverance Accomplished" (*CB*, 4:243); "The Hole in the Elbow" (*CB*, 4:451); "Laughing

During Prayers" (*CB*, 5:329); "Trust Not Appearances" (*YM*, 1:121); and "Eighteen Tests of Good Breeding: Ways in Which Young People Render Themselves Very Impolite" (*YM*, 1:273). Two of these "ways" were rather appalling: reading aloud in company without being asked and cutting one's fingernails in public!

The editors envisioned themselves, as one reader put it, "a ray of sunshine on our family" (*CB*, 3:461) or, as another said, "a helping hand in educating my children" (*CB*, 3:98). Therefore, they stated their purpose "to assist you to guide, to guard, to strengthen your children for the coming conflicts of life" (*CB*, 2:157). Thus, the parents came in for their share of admonitory pieces such as "Teach Your Children to Pray" (*CB*, 2:157) and "The Tired Housekeeper"—an unusual morality directed at mothers who felt harried by all the demands of home and family—concluding that "only by death can a wife and mother be released from her many cares and duties. Bear your trials patiently, and be thankful you have so many dear ones to love, so many sweet motives for exertion" (*YM*, 1:161).

The editors' attitude toward poetry cited above could very well have been predicated on the quality of verse they had selected for inclusion in the pages of their publications. Most of the verse contained in the *Children's Book* and *Youth's Magazine* was cautionary: "Employment, That Is Enjoyment" (*CB*, 1:237); "He Never Told a Lie" (*CB*, 1:335); "Do Not Hurry" (*CB*, 2:364); "Games of Life" (*CB*, 4:250); "On Whiskey" (*CB*, 4:271); "What Shall I Give?" (*CB*, 5:346); "Do the Best That You Can" (*YM*, 1:378); "Will You Be There?" (*YM*, 1:57); "Not in Vain" (*YM*, 1:346); "The Orphan" (*YM*, 1:559); and "Take Care of the Hook," addressed to a young *fish* (*CB*, 4:420). An inordinate number of selections dealt with the dead or dying child: "Early Lost, Early Saved" (*CB*, 4:71); "Waiting for God to Come for Me" (*CB*, 4:264); "The Dying Child" (*CB*, 3:443); "On the Death of Little Andrew" (*CB*, 5:444); "Little Bessie and the Way in Which She Fell Asleep" (*CB*, 5:105); "The Dead Baby" (*YM*, 1:134); "Going Home" (*YM*, 1:75); "Little Willie Taken Up" (*CB*, 5:183); "My Boy in Heaven" (*YM*, 1:511); "Sent to Heaven" (*YM*, 1:564); and "My Darling's Shoes" (*YM*, 1:74).

A few "poems," however, were of a more interesting content: "The Grammar School," a verse on the parts of speech (*CB*, 1:34); "The Use of Flowers" (*CB*, 5:132); "The Meaning of Words" (*CB*, 4:374); "Uncle Sam," a patriotic piece containing the names of "all 33 states" in its stanzas (*YM*, 1:180); and "Paltering in a Double Sense," which was a trick poem about the Revolutionary War, which could be variously



interpreted by reading it in different patterns on either side of the commas appearing in every line (*YM*, 1:235).

The editors of the *Book* and *Youth's Magazine* frequently expressed their personal opinions about sports and games. According to them, such seemingly innocent pastimes as shooting marbles and jumping rope were not without their perils. When Aunt Alice was asked in the Correspondence about playing marbles, her reply was that she held it in very low esteem because "it provides no exercise," is played in a "hurtful position," "fosters angry feelings and harsh words, promotes selfishness, and tempts dishonesty and cheating" (*CB*, 2:355-6).

In "Caution to the Young," Uncle Robin listed several things for young people to beware of: the cardplaying circle, the gambling table, the ballroom, the dram shop, the billiard saloon, and the theatre. "Beware of such resorts; you can find respectable recreation elsewhere" (*CB*, 3:86), he urged. "A Just Reproof" lauded the refusal of brandy even for an "indisposition," as you do not "know where the first sip will lead you" (*YM*, 1:457). In another issue the children are cautioned against jumping rope, which is "so dangerous as to do injury to yourselves from which you may never recover." An example is provided of one woman "who was made a cripple for life" from jumping rope and of another who "sunk into absolute helplessness" as a result of jumping rope (*CB*, 4:156). Two little-known games are included, which apparently had the editors' blessing: "Honestly" and "Philopoena." The latter, a forfeits game imported from Germany, consisted of one person's drawing another into accepting a favor, and if successful, he said, "Philopoena"; the whole activity is known as "exchanging Philopoenas" (*CB*, 2:172). "Honestly," described as a "Winter Evening Game," was played by piling on hands and counting. The person whose number was called must answer questions asked by the other players "honestly." The editor warned that "the group should be careful not to ask questions which it would be improper to answer before a mixed company" (*CB*, 5:345). Another amusing note in the *Book* was a verse entitled "Is Not Santa Claus a God?"—a question supposedly "asked by a little child who had heard so many 'grand tales' of Santa Claus that he thought he must be a second God," but his father "reassures him and convinces him to believe in the Only One" (*CB*, 1:249).

When all avenues of literature had been exhausted, two direct vehicles remained to our editors for the instruction of the young: Aunt

Alice had her "Advice Column" or "Chat with Her Nephews and Nieces," where she once said: "Be generous to orphans, say a verse of Scripture every morning at the table, value honest labor: idleness is a disgrace and a sin" (CB, 2:52). "Advice to Boys," in the Miscellaneous Reading Department, was Uncle Robin's chance to counsel on topics such as getting rich, detecting a thief, controlling one's temper, always doing well in whatever is undertaken, and avoiding "sauciness, passion, and laziness" (CB, 5:192).

The content of all these selections is only an extension of the customary fare of the magazines, but the tone and the details embodied in these articles distinguished by inclusion here are arresting to a reading audience more than a century removed from these "studies, trials, and troubles of youth," as the editors frequently termed them.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The material for this paper is a result of work done on a volume tentatively entitled *Children's Periodicals*, edited by Professor R. Gordon Kelly of the University of Maryland and to be published by Greenwood Press. I am indebted to the Rare Book Collections in Duke University and UNC-Chapel Hill Libraries for the use of their resources.

<sup>2</sup> *Children's Book of Choice and Entertaining Reading for the Little Folks at Home*, 1(1855), 3. Further reference to this magazine will appear parenthetically in the text as *CB* with volume and page numbers.

<sup>3</sup> *Youth's Magazine*, 1(1860), 44. Further reference to this magazine will appear parenthetically in the text as *YM* with volume and page numbers.