

PLEASURE AND PERIL:  
SHAPING CHILDREN'S READING IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

## INTRODUCTION

If a hungry little traveler shows up at your house, you might want to give him a cookie. If you give him a cookie, he's going to ask for a glass of milk. He'll want to look in a mirror to make sure he doesn't have a milk mustache, and then he'll ask for a pair of scissors to give himself a trim ...

The consequences of giving a cookie to this energetic mouse run the young host ragged, but young readers will come away smiling at the antics that tumble like dominoes through the pages of this delightful picture book.

– from the inside flap of *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*

According to Laura Joffe Numeroff, giving a mouse a cookie is no simple matter.

Actions have consequences. And if you give a mouse a cookie, the story goes, he will take you down a long, irreversible path of other requests, some reasonable and others completely unexpected. The same applies to any mouse to whom you might offer a muffin, or pig a pancake, for that matter. In short, think twice before providing any animal with a free snack, no matter how cute or needy he may appear to be.<sup>1</sup>

The two paragraphs I appropriate for an epigraph presumably address adults deciding whether or not to present *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* to its intended child audience. These older readers may not yet know the story itself, but they know where to turn to find it. They are expected to turn, moreover, not to the body of the text (short as it may be) but to flap of the inside front cover. There, an apparently authorless statement constructs them as consumers in two separate but not completely disentangled ways. The first paragraph condenses for adults the story that follows for children, effectively aligning these two sets of readers. The second breaks apart this unified reception by

suggesting more broadly how Numeroff's tale engages its juvenile audience. Adults, then, inhabit multiple positions in relation to *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*. They are addressed at its literal margins as consumers of the story and as consumers of the book as a product. Their attention flickers between the words and images on the page and the child – or does it somehow stay focused on both? Adults are at once not the actual audience of *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* and precisely its target, as the anticipated selectors and purchasers of children's literature.

Numeroff's story is oddly both linear and circular. It begins with a boy seated on his front lawn with a magazine and a box of cookies. A traveling mouse enters the scene, which is illustrated by Felicia Bond (we can tell he's traveling from his overalls and backpack). Once offered the cookie (for which, it should be noted, he made no direct request), the mouse reasonably asks for a glass of milk, then a napkin, and the adventure begins. He even asks at one point to be read to, and then for art supplies so that he may recreate some drawings from the book. The day ends with the child ("you," in Numeroff's second-person construction) fast asleep, the house in disarray, and the mouse completing the cause-and-effect circuit by requesting another cookie. The cycle begins again, or it would, were "we" not already so worn out.

This tale of fatiguing generosity opens up two routes of identification for its child audience, much like the address on its inside flap did for adults. The diegetic "you" invites the child to read him/herself into the position of the adult caretaker, no doubt familiar with the causal chain of meeting a child's request only to be greeted by its logical follow-up. But the child is also able to read him/herself as the demanding mouse, whose request for a story potentially replicates the child's real-life path to *If You Give a*

*Mouse a Cookie*. Reading is at once the means of connecting with this book, a feature of its plot, and part of the exhausting process of serving others. At the end of Numeroff's book, these possibilities overlap and resolve themselves for their juvenile and grown-up readers. The sleeping boy embodies and legitimates adult exhaustion from a long day of care and entertainment. But he also represents a parental fantasy: the resting child is fulfilled; he makes no more requests.

### Reading Backward

The argument of this thesis does not hinge upon *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* or any its sequels. In fact, I fix my attention about a century before these books hit the market, but nevertheless find Numeroff's work useful for its ability to draw together so many aspects of my project. In just under thirty pages of heavily illustrated text, a book like *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* addresses adult and child readers through its story and as a material commercial object. These readerly positions are never completely distinct: kids access "their" literature through adults, and adults continually rely on children to form a sense of what it means to read. The first part of this claim – that a "children's" book bears the stamp of grown-up authors, publishers, advertisers, teachers, parents, librarians, etc. – may seem obvious; the second may be less so. But adults do get something out of children's reading – we must. In this thesis, I step into this intersection to investigate what kinds of stakes adults have in a process we celebrate, regulate, make a living from, and which forms part of our own identities as readers.

I suppose the question is: if you can find threads of these stakes in *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*, why drag them through the pages of a master's thesis or any other academic project? My hope is that the two chapters that follow historically and

theoretically situate some of the impressions I gleaned from this recent picture book. The first concentrates on a series of four illustrated plates presented in two prescriptive advice manuals published in 1903. These images, all of which carry the title “The Two Paths,” present the life stories of young male and female readers in an if-then manner very similar to Numeroff’s. They are turn-of-the-century versions of *If You Give a Girl a French Novel* and *If You Give a Boy a Cigarette*, depicting the causes and effects of good and bad reading in parallel linear sequences. Like the circular ending of *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*, the “good” versions of “The Two Paths” end by gesturing at how reading reproduces itself from one generation to the next. I argue that these concluding gestures, along with the full narratives of “The Two Paths,” provide clues about the uniquely gendered and raced meanings of children’s reading in the early twentieth century.

In the second chapter, I broaden my focus to consider how one institution – namely, the public library – helped to construct children as consumers of books in the decades surrounding 1900. The particular copy of *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* I have been using bears various stamps marking it as property of the Williamsburg Regional Library. In other words, it is not quite mine, though I maintain the right to keep it on my bookshelf for the next three weeks. Like a parent or child browsing through the library’s collection, I looked at the cover, paged through the story, and chose this book to meet my particular needs. This selection process, probably familiar to today’s library users, has its own history. In the nineteenth century, most libraries in America kept their shelves closed to the public and their collections free of juvenile reading material, conditions that changed approaching the turn to the twentieth. In 1903, Melvil Dewey, whose

eponymous classification system still organizes most public library collections, wrote that:

Recent investigations ... have shown that the chief influence on the life of the child, and through him on the citizen of the future, came not from father, mother, teacher or school, but from the reading of childhood. The librarian ... who guides more than any other force the reading of the community, therefore, holds in his hand the longest lever with which man has ever pried.<sup>2</sup>

Dewey's vision inserted the librarian into a picture of national uplift and citizen education that depended less upon the school than it did the public library. The latter concentrated its efforts on "the reading of childhood," an activity Dewey characterized with this same sort of determinism that fueled prescriptive literature, and which librarians used to claim a space for themselves and their work in twentieth-century America.

#### Words and Pictures

Any work that invokes "children" and "reading" as frequently as this one needs to outline as precisely as possible what these words are supposed to signify. Neither is obvious, and neither carries a single meaning throughout. For me, "children" and "reading" are more families of words than they are discrete concepts. They include and exceed other, associated terms:

<b>Children</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Adult</b>
Girls	Looking	
Boys	Becoming	
Kids	Desiring	
Adolescents	Browsing	
Young	Shopping	
Juvenile	Consuming	

"Children" and "Reading" do not appear at the top of these lists because they are inherently more important than the terms that follow them, but because in this thesis, they

serve as lenses through which I access and deploy the others. Children are the subjects and reading is the verb around which these other words function. To the right of the “Reading” column above, there is a blank space in which I imagine, but have not provided, a list topped by the word “Adult.” As I see it, this is what most discussions of childhood reading leave unaddressed. Rather than brainstorm the elements of that list now, I want to proceed with it open-ended, without forgetting its presence. This is the most honest way I know of approaching a discussion of childhood.

Actual children will be hard to find in this thesis, but honestly, I feel little pressure to present them. If there is a disconnect between “real” and “imagined” children – and I believe that there is – it is ultimately less misleading for me to situate myself on the side of the imagined. No children were harmed in the making of this document, but neither were any helped. My attention rests elsewhere, which is not to say that I throw up my hands at real kids, but that claims to address, include, or serve them in any “real” sense would have to accompany a very different project. The children that enter this document do so primarily through “adult” texts like advice manuals and journal articles. Although these sources present a range of child readers, most concentrate on those between the ages of about ten and fifteen. In “The Two Paths,” the young male and female readers are fifteen and thirteen, respectively. The professional library literature of the period also focused on later stages of childhood, although early reading and pre-reading activities gained prominence as the twentieth century progressed. Nevertheless, most attention seemed to rest upon readers approaching the newly-constructed stage of adolescence.

Reading is likewise difficult to pinpoint, since it is not a singular activity. Depending on the material, skill level, attention, and any number of other factors attributable to the reader and text, it can accomplish very different goals. And, as Kate Flint argues, “reading is increasingly acknowledged to be an activity poised between an intensely private, inward experience on the one hand, and, on the other, as inseparable from a social world.”<sup>3</sup> This inter-penetration of public and private lends reading a certain intrigue and even fear. An observer may know that someone is reading, and even what they are reading, but beneath those facts lays an infuriatingly subjective process. Our access to reading is never complete access, even when presented with actual readers and actual texts.

As children acquire the ability to access written text, then, they also gain the power to conceal that experience from adults. The hopes and worries generated by this necessary concealment secure children’s reading as an adult concern. In this thesis, there is no direct route to “children,” “reading,” or any of the terms listed beneath them. The closest it gets is at how these two intersect in graphic and written texts that, perhaps inadvertently, shed as much light on turn-of-the-century adulthood as they do children’s reading practices.



## CHAPTER I

## PRESCRIPTIVE LITERATURE AND THE REPRODUCTION OF READING

In 1903, J.L. Nichols & Co. published a pair of advice manuals written by Mr. and Mrs. John William Gibson. *Social Purity* and *Golden Thoughts on Chastity and Procreation* were very similar books that addressed white and African American audiences, respectively. Although they shared the same written text, it would be unfair to say that these books imparted the same “advice” to their readers; for, in addition to their distinctive titles, they contained different introductions and illustrations. These details and the contradictions they generate are captured in the Library of Congress’ *Guide to American Women*, which presents *Social Purity* and *Golden Thoughts* as both the products of a “rare” publishing strategy and sources for the “standard messages presented to girls and women in hundreds of volumes of prescriptive literature.”<sup>4</sup> These books, then, are in some ways literally identical and in others distinctly not so, part of a body of prescriptive and predictable literature and a deviation from its publishing tradition. In this chapter, I first trace these strands of similarity and difference as they functioned in the broader context of J.L. Nichols & Co.’s operations and then look at how they converged around a set of images, all entitled “The Two Paths,” which depicted the fates of young readers for the audiences of *Social Purity* and *Golden Thoughts*.

Based in Naperville, Illinois, J.L. Nichols & Co. was a turn-of-the-century subscription book house. The firm published conduct manuals, collected biographies,

and, most notably, the first edition of Booker T. Washington's *The Story of My Life and Work*, a book-length autobiography written almost a year before *The Outlook* magazine began to print Washington's more well-known *Up from Slavery* in serial form. In his Introduction to Volume One of the *Booker T. Washington Papers*, Louis R. Harlan describes *The Story of My Life and Work* as standard fare for Nichols & Co., which, he writes, "specialized in cheap subscription books, often did haphazard work, and produced shoddy products."<sup>5</sup> His description is singularly damning: along with Washington's poor choice of a ghostwriter, Nichols' "greedy impatience" assured that *The Story of My Life and Work* would be released full of errors, a general disappointment to both Washington and his editor.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, it seems that Washington began work on *Up from Slavery* even before this first autobiography was complete.

Even in 1900, Washington's reputation would have ensured that this title stood out among the other offerings of this minor publisher, a fact which prompts Harlan to speculate as to why he "offered such a plum to this obscure subscription book house."<sup>7</sup> At least part of the reason seems to have been Washington's desire to address his first autobiography to black audiences. In spite of coming up short on quality, Nichols & Co. ran a relatively successful subscription operation, wherein agents sold books door-to-door in African-American neighborhoods in both northern and southern states.<sup>8</sup> Embarrassed by its flaws or perhaps trying to guarantee a market for his forthcoming *Up from Slavery*, it was Washington who insisted that his book be sold exclusively by subscription "to the barely-educated masses of the South and the black ghettos of the North."<sup>9</sup> In a letter to Washington's secretary, John A. Hertel, general manager of Nichols & Co., rather harshly described the audience Washington would have hoped to reach through this firm:

You know that nine-tenths of the people who buy subscription books are not very intelligent – that is to say, they are not very well- read .... Mr. Washington recognized this fact and stated to me personally ... that he desired to have this book sold on subscription and he wanted a house to take it who had a method that would enable canvassers to carry it to the remoted districts and put it in the hands of the masses.<sup>10</sup>

I raise these exchanges between Washington and Nichols & Co. less for what they have to tell us about *The Story of My Life and Work* than for the ways they help to characterize the racial politics of this particular publishing operation. Whether or not *The Story of My Life and Work* was a typical product for J.L. Nichols & Co., Washington's relationship with them furnishes a rare account of how this all but forgotten company viewed itself and its market of readers. Louis Harlan repeatedly notes the firm's financial instability as he describes its attempts to use Washington's personal appearances as marketing tools and even to swindle him out of royalties. In spite of these tensions, however, Washington seems to have kept up a relationship with Nichols & Co. He contributed an introduction to multiple editions of their biographical encyclopedia *The Colored American*, several of which listed John William Gibson as their primary author.<sup>11</sup>

By the time J.L. Nichols & Co. began to sell Gibson's *Social Purity* and *Golden Thoughts, Up from Slavery* was being read by whites around the United States, but it was an entirely different text – and product – from the one Nichols & Co. initially sold. Washington seems to have realized early on that he should promote separate stories to separate audiences. This is not to say that *The Story of My Life and Work* never made it into the hands of white readers. Instruction booklets like the one carried by Mary A. Willis, a “canvasser” from Orange, Virginia, offered distinct guidelines for selling Washington's biography to households of different races.<sup>12</sup> Audience segregation, in

other words, was built into the model of subscription bookselling before *Social Purity* and *Golden Thoughts* came along. With these manuals, however, Nichols & Co. took the marketing process one step further, separating black readers from white ones before the text was even printed. These books represented a movement toward the simultaneous construction of text (commodity) and reader (consumer) to facilitate a more synchronous marketing strategy. Salespeople no longer had to adapt their pitch for differently raced readers; they only had to provide explicitly raced products for customers with established racial affiliations.

That *Social Purity* and *Golden Thoughts* contain the same written text is remarkable. John Kasson, in his study of nineteenth-century manners books, cites only two works written specifically for African Americans in a bibliography of over 150. One of these, the 1888 *On Habits and Manners*, was originally written for students at the Hampton Institute, but “adapted to general [i.e., white] use” eleven years later.<sup>13</sup> Nichols & Co., in contrast, released the Gibsons’ advice to its different audiences simultaneously and without textual adaptation. “General use,” in this case, did not imply a white readership. In fact, given the previous catalog of Nichols & Co. products as well as the list of consultants in *Social Purity* and *Golden Thoughts*, it seems more likely (albeit hard to prove) that this advice was originally intended for a black audience rather than a white one. Ultimately, it is not the prospect of uncovering the origin story for these two manuals that makes them so intriguing, but the ways that they, in contrast to a work like *On Habits and Manners*, refuse such stories altogether. Never intended to be placed side-by-side in front of a single reader, *Social Purity* and *Golden Thoughts* deliberately tell

different kinds of stories, and impart different kinds of advice, when we defy the publisher's desires to examine them in this manner.

In his introduction to *Golden Thoughts*, Henry R. Butler, a physician and surgeon at Morris Brown College, implies that while the Gibsons' books may contain the same written text, this only accounts for one of their stories:

The art work is especially interesting and important. I wish to call the reader's attention to these illustrations.... I entreat you to study these pictures as well as the reading matter; they tell their own story; they tell of the coming of a new aristocracy, a people powerful in strength, morals, culture, wealth and refinement.<sup>14</sup>

Although the images in *Golden Thoughts* depict African Americans while those in *Social Purity* portray whites, the illustrations in these two manuals roughly correspond to one another, often sharing titles and appearing at the same point in each text (Fig. 1). With regard to graphics, the main difference between *Social Purity* and *Golden Thoughts* seems to be the instructions each text provides its readers for viewing the images they contain rather than the content of the images themselves. The introduction to *Social Purity* (signed only "The Authors") is comparatively terse, with no mention of the story being told by the images that follow, let alone an entreaty to study them. Whereas black and white readers were expected to read and follow the same written advice, they not only encountered racially specific images, but received very different instructions about how to interpret them. Why were the illustrations so much more important to one text than the other? And what does this tell us about how the authors and publisher viewed their audiences? How are we to interpret the relative silence about the meanings and importance of the artwork in *Social Purity*?

It could be that Nichols & Co. assumed white audiences already knew that the illustrations told their own story; to remind them of this would be useless at best, insulting at worst. Another, and I believe more likely explanation, is that the publishers assumed African American readers would ascribe greater importance to the illustrations than white ones. I am not suggesting that the images in *Social Purity* carry no meaning (at the very least, they ensured that Nichols & Co. could not be accused of peddling an inferior product to white readers) but rather that readers of different races, even if they did seek similar advice for similar reasons, were not expected to relate to these manuals in the same way. In other words, leaving racial difference out of the written text did not remove it from these books entirely, but forced it to manifest itself in alternative ways. Through their titles, introductions, and especially their illustrations, *Social Purity* and *Golden Thoughts* thoroughly constructed and addressed their audiences along racial lines.

15

### The Two Paths

Two versions of an image plate entitled “The Two Paths” appear in each of the Gibsons’ manuals, one depicting the possible fates of a young boy, the other those of a young girl (Figs. 2-5). These four illustrations, while raced and gendered differently, clearly follow the same basic pattern. All begin with a photograph of a seven-year-old child centered on the top of the page. The space below the photograph is bifurcated into columns of drawings that represent the child at four different stages of his/her life. The right tells a story of moral and physical growth that ends in happiness and success, while the left depicts a path of degeneracy, poverty, and loneliness. In the center of each page, a block of text serves the double purpose of narrating the “two paths” and keeping them

physically separate. In all four cases, the image at the bottom right (that of the end of the morally right path) depicts a dignified elderly man or woman seated with a grandchild of the same gender as the venerated grandparent. The equation of moral and physical health with the reproducibility of that health in children and grandchildren is perhaps the theme most forcefully stressed in the narrative of “The Two Paths.” Before examining the manner in which the images deploy a politics of reproductive health, it is worth considering in brief the way in which the various versions of “The Two Paths” themselves reproduce elements of an older tradition of bourgeois didacticism. In doing so I hope to show that these images participate in a milieu of racial discourse with which they were contemporary and, at the same time, in a broader and more historically entrenched tradition of didactic art which comes to these books with a racial history of its own.

In their mixture of written text and graphics to depict successive stages of degeneracy, “The Two Paths” draws its formal logic from a tradition that goes back at least as far as William Hogarth’s *A Harlot’s Progress* (1732) and *A Rake’s Progress* (1735) – two series of engravings that secured his place as a pioneer in the production and distribution of sequential, narrative art. *A Harlot’s Progress* tells the story of Moll Hackabout, a young country girl swept into prostitution upon moving to the big city; she eventually dies of venereal disease, leaving behind a son. The popularity of this tale of moral failure prompted Hogarth to create a sequel a few years later, which he called *A Rake’s Progress*. This time, the story featured a young man, an unindustrious son of a successful merchant who, although he starts off with benefits of class never accorded to the young harlot, meets a similarly miserable fate. Hogarth initially crafted these two

tales of moral failure as a series of paintings. Later, he re-created them as engravings and sold the images, now paired with written exposition, in mass-produced runs. In addition to his sequential artwork (a sort of precursor to the comic strip) Hogarth is known for his dislike of booksellers (who had helped to land his family in debtor's prison when he was a child).<sup>16</sup> Consequently, his decision to produce *A Harlot's Progress* and *A Rake's Progress* as sets of engravings cannot be seen as disengaged from the larger world of eighteenth-century British print culture. Hogarth was not just interested in creating a mixed media form; he was interested in doing so precisely for the purpose of sidestepping the traditional publishing process and, like a subscription house such as Nichols & Co., selling his product directly to consumers.

Perhaps even more relevant to "The Two Paths" than these two satiric stories of "progress" is a later work of Hogarth's entitled *Industry and Idleness* (1747). This set of twelve engravings, Hogarth explains in his *Autobiographical Notes*, "[w]ere calculated for the use & instruction of those young people wherein every thing necessary to be convey'd to them is fully explained in words as well as figure."<sup>17</sup> Whereas *A Harlot's Progress* and *A Rake's Progress* only presented stories of failure, Hogarth uses this later work to place the accounts of industry and idleness side by side (in much the same fashion as "The Two Paths"). Like "The Two Paths," *Industry and Idleness* begins by depicting Francis Goodchild and Thomas Idle within the same image (Fig. 7). After establishing their very different attitudes toward manual labor, the narrative splits to follow Francis as he becomes a husband (to his master's daughter) and sheriff, and Thomas, who is sent off to sea and eventually executed. As grown men, their paths cross once again, when Tom is tried and convicted on murder charges in the court where



Francis serves as Alderman. *Industry and Idleness* ends with a plate that depicts Francis Goodchild becoming the mayor of London. Tom Idle is already dead at this point (having been executed in the previous panel) so there is no corresponding image of him. Like the prospective readers of “The Two Paths,” Hogarth’s audience would leave *Industry and Idleness* on a positive note. Francis is rewarded for his hard work, prayer, and other generally good behavior, while Tom is obliterated by the hand of industry.

In “Black Bodies, White Bodies,” Sander L. Gilman notes that Hogarth’s narratives locate the “perversities of human sexuality” in the figure of the black servant – a young black male in the second plate of *A Harlot’s Progress* and a young woman at the brothel frequented by Tom in *A Rake’s Progress*. Gilman argues that “[b]y the eighteenth century, the sexuality of the black, both male and female, bec[ame] an icon for deviant sexuality in general.”<sup>18</sup> While this might be the case, the examples he pulls from Hogarth suggest that the servants in these prints do not carry the iconic burden of white sexual transgression exclusively through their blackness. The degeneracy embodied by these figures, as well as those in “The Two Paths,” depends upon visual markers of class and age as much as those of race. Isolating the latter may serve Gilman’s argument, but it opens up for future consideration those categories in which he is less interested.

After his discussion of these early commercial prints, Gilman looks to the late-nineteenth century, by which time, he writes, the sexual work performed by the black servants in Hogarth’s narratives was replaced by an internalized understanding of *all* female sexuality as pathological. To argue this point, Gilman looks to two figures – the Hottentot female and the prostitute – whose iconographic status helped to create and circulate ideas of female sexuality. His claim that the sexual organs of Sarah Baartmann,

also known as the “Hottentot Venus,” “serve as the central image for the Black female throughout the nineteenth century” has not gone uncontested.<sup>19</sup> Sociologist Zine Magubane, for example, criticizes Gilman for removing his discussion of Baartmann from her political and historical context, and questions the ways that more recent scholars of race and gender replicate this move by uncritically citing Gilman’s work. Magubane in turn argues that the racial markers on which Gilman and others depend, such as skin color and hair texture, “were not stabilized as markers of racial difference until fairly late in the nineteenth century.”<sup>20</sup> Magubane’s task, however, is not just to reperiodize the discourse of racial difference. She wants to argue, rather, that any writer whose argument relies upon icons such as that of Sarah Baartmann must pay particular attention to the historical setting out of which those icons arose. To ignore issues of context only risks re-essentializing discussions of race.

With this in mind, I want to establish a context for the “Two Paths,” at least to the extent to which it is possible to do so. If, as Gilman suggests, nineteenth-century scientific racism depended upon a language of visual certainty to represent difference (the icon), the turn to the twentieth century was characterized, among other things, by a muddying of these (to be sure, never pristine) visual waters. Perhaps more definitively than any other, a less visible language of sexuality stepped in to occupy and define the still-important space of difference.<sup>21</sup>

Siobhan Somerville, in *Queering the Color Line*, describes how this shift linked race and sexuality in new ways: “Whereas previously, two bodies, the mulatto and the invert, had been linked together in a visual economy, now two tabooed types of desire – interracial and homosexual – became linked ... through the model of ‘abnormal’ sexual

object choice.”<sup>22</sup> By the nature of the historical moment in which they were created, *Golden Thoughts* and *Social Purity* fall somewhere within this transition from the visibility of the hybrid body to the invisibility of transgressive desire. The four illustrations of “The Two Paths” serve as potential sites in which to examine these shifts as they functioned for black and white readers. The reading process is itself one of desiring, consuming, and, as Kathryn Kent argues, identity formation.<sup>23</sup> As depicted in these plates, reading circulates within Somerville’s matrix of legible bodies and desired objects. It does this, I believe, not as an analogy for sexuality but as a domain of behavior capable of enabling or derailing the project of reproduction. A reader can be identified by an onlooker who connects the former’s body to the book it holds. At the same time, the specific nature of one’s reading can remain mysterious – the specific words illegible, the mental processes invisible. In “The Two Paths,” books become potential “abnormal object choices” – a threat that is imagined quite differently for boys than it is for girls.

“The Two Paths” are neither starting nor ending points in Somerville’s progression: their history can be traced back to works like those of Hogarth and their legacy carried forward to a later, explicitly eugenic manual called *Safe Counsel*, published by Nichols & Co. in 1926 (Fig. 7).<sup>24</sup> They are, in other words, both recycled and recyclable. Like the manuals that contain them, their messages might be “standard,” but their form is somewhat peculiar: a mix of photographs and sketches subjected to formal strategies for creating racial difference. Ostensibly, the stories they tell are about behavior, about choices, and about their consequences. Read collectively, however, they also create a narrative about how the agents involved with the production of *Golden*

*Thoughts* and *Social Purity* understood and chose to depict differences of age, race, gender, and class.

Most crucial here are the ways that the illustrations create racial differences, for these are ones which, for all practical purposes, had already been solidified by the publisher's decision to release *Social Purity* and *Golden Thoughts* as separate titles. It makes a certain amount of sense that Nichols & Co. would have adapted "The Two Paths" so that readers of different races could find images with which they could easily identify. (It certainly would have been jarring for a white reader to turn page 58 and find Figure 2.) What is not as apparent – at least, not immediately – is why it was so important to present these illustrations to all readers in the first place, and how they had to be altered for this to be possible. If some of these alterations can be explained away (e.g., shading in the faces of the white and black figures differently) others succumb to the temptations of logic less easily. Why, for instance, would the paths begin to present their black and white characters as literal mirror images of one another? These apparently *non-sensical* moves open up that other narrative, the narrative of difference, in ways that discourage easy, rational explanations. What they do offer, on the other hand, is insight into the ways that authors, artists, and publishers understood and presented race to their readers. This is the space that I begin to explore below.

Together, the four versions of "The Two Paths" present a cascade of choices: the good path opposes the bad one; girlhood opposes boyhood; the white child opposes the black one. While the values each depicts are assumed to carry equal weight in the lives of literate Americans, whether black or white, male or female, these plates differ in their constitutive images and texts as well as their formal composition.<sup>25</sup> To begin, there are

differences in their subtitles. For the white audience, “What will the girl become?” and “What will the boy become?” are phrased as questions. This may be implied syntactically for the African American children, but the choice is nevertheless presented without punctuation, and, I would argue, the possibility for agency or contestatory response that it carries. To ask a question is to open up avenues through which it can be answered (although in this case, we are presented with two firm possibilities). Without explicitly posing these outcomes as questions, “What will the girl become” and “what will the boy become” turn into directives. The sense of choice is absent: the black girl will become an outcast, or a grandmother, the boy a moral and physical wreck or a grandfather. The other major formal difference between these image plates is the amount and placement of text within them. Clearly, more description accompanies the illustrations intended for white audiences. The commentary separating the “two paths” is longer and more detailed, and the smaller icons include the ages of the white readers above the labels. The abridged text in the *Golden Thoughts* is placed within a box, separating it from the accompanying images and inviting readers to digest them without referring to the written word. These differences bind black identity to the image in ways that may not be necessary, or possible, for whites. They also address the African American audience as one which can, or will, read less than whites when presented a page with both text and graphics.<sup>26</sup>

Each of the female versions of “The Two Paths” begins with a “beautiful little girl” whose portrait appears at the top of the page. This is her sole photographic representation; in every other stage of her development, positive or not, she is depicted in drawings which do not sustain the realism and specificity of the initial picture. While both girls are supposed to be seven years old, the African American girl appears to be

much younger, or, at least, significantly younger than her white counterpart.<sup>27</sup> The journeys themselves begin in a very similar fashion in terms of the drawings used to depict the girls. At thirteen, they are represented by nearly identical sketches in which shading and hairstyle are the sole markers of racial difference. The distinction between the paths at this stage depends upon the written word. “Bad Literature” and “Study and Obedience” would look very similar if left unlabeled. But in both *Social Purity* and *Golden Thoughts*, it is the narrative presented by the text block that marks the good path from the bad most certainly. It may *seem* like these girls are all immersed in the same act of reading, but only if we are unaware of the nature of the books they hold. As it turns out, the girls on the left, both black and white, have begun their downward spirals with *Sapho*, a “vile novel” whose title presents the overlapping threats posed by the mistress and the lesbian.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, even if *Sapho*’s didactic message stresses the threat of uncontrolled sexuality over any overt discussion of homosexuality, the invocation of its title alone would have evoked suggestions of lesbianism for readers of *Golden Thoughts* and *Social Purity*.

At age nineteen, racial difference is again depicted through the shading of faces and hairstyles, but in a manner much more pronounced than for the girls in early adolescence. Whereas “Virtue and Devotion” seems to follow the pattern established by the young readers above, “Flirting and Coquetry” marks something of a departure. Racial difference is heightened in a new way, one that rests upon the reader’s perceived access to the women being depicted. Where the written text describes the white woman “at nineteen *Flirting and Coquetry*,” the young African American is directly labeled “a *Flirt*.” This difference – between engaging in flirtatious behavior and being a flirt – is not

only about identifying the black woman with more certainty, but about depriving black readers of precisely that power to decide whether the acts of flirting and the state of coquetry are up for interpretation, or if they can confidently determine the “nature” of the woman in question. The description in *Golden Thoughts*, in addition to making far more grammatical sense, assumes far less hesitation on the part of the reader to link the woman’s actions and her very being.

This difference also manifests itself graphically. In “Flirting and Coquetry” both women gaze out at their readers, but again, our access to the white figure is obscured or made less certain. The veil, for example, performs different work for the women of either race. For the white woman, it becomes a barrier between her and the man who watches her from behind. He seems forced to direct his attention to the fan rather than to her face, while the woman looks out to the reader. This is not true of the black man, whose focus is not redirected to the fan but falls directly upon the woman. Her veil, which *should* be obscuring both the man’s and the reader’s view of her face, seems rather to be providing us access to her. The whites of her eyes and the bright spots that seem to represent jewels in the veil keep this woman from being almost completely and literally black. In other words, both versions present a triangulated relationship between woman-man-reader, but in doing so, open up different narrative possibilities. In *Social Purity*, the reader and woman return one another’s gazes while the man focuses elsewhere; in *Golden Thoughts*, both the reader’s and man’s gazes converge upon “a *Flirt*.”

By the time “The Two Paths” reaches young womanhood, its strategies for representing racial differences have had to change. Race, no longer adequately depicted through the shading of face and hair (you can only darken an image so much before its

blackness renders it illegible), is instead represented as a reversal of perspectives. In the two versions of “Flirting and Coquetry,” it is the man in the background whose attention seems to alter between the woman and her fan. Beginning at age twenty-six however, each stage of “The Two Paths” represents black and white women as mirror images of one another. The overall shift in their perspective is not so much in relation to the reader, or even to the other figures depicted in the illustration. What remains constant is their opposed relation to the block of text: where the white woman looks inward, the black woman looks away and vice versa. Like the use of shading to mark blackness or whiteness, this reversal of perspectives becomes a way of distinguishing between otherwise identical images, that is, to make “The Two Paths” a racially distinct text for racially distinct audiences. Moreover, both techniques establish similarities even as they create difference by allowing one drawing – darkened, lightened, or flipped over – to stand for two groups of women.

Importantly, this shared iconography is not always sufficient for portraying difference in “The Two Paths.” In the two versions of “An Honored Grandmother,” race is embodied in the grandchildren to whom the old women read. The wavy blond hair of one contrasts with the sharp silhouette of the other, and for the first time, the demand for easy, visual signifiers necessitates drawing completely different faces. While the African American and white granddaughters both represent the successful culmination of “The Two Paths,” they *cannot* be the same person. The granddaughters do not resemble one another so much as they recall their own grandmothers, pictured “as pure as sunbeams” on the top of their respective pages. This purity, it seems to me, is specifically racial. That is, part of what makes them pure is their inability to function as substitutes for one



another in the same way that the later drawings can, with the help of shading and mirroring. The use of photography serves as proof of racial difference by demonstrating the impossibility of using a single image to stand for these two girls.

It is this impossibility that the later drawings of the granddaughters seek to replicate. But the granddaughters are not photographs. If this is stating the obvious, less obvious are the potential meanings and implications of this difference. Unlike their grandmothers whose photographs hover at the top of the page, these girls are never outside or above the logic of the two paths. The sketches accompanying “An Honored Grandmother” not only introduce the granddaughters as already part of “The Two Paths,” but place them firmly on the side of the “good” path. It is the act of reading, furthermore, that locates them on the “right” side of the page. This final depiction of reading functions quite differently from those which split the grandmothers’ paths at age thirteen. At that earlier stage, readers of *Golden Thoughts* or *Social Purity* had to be told, in explicit, non-graphic terms how to distinguish between honorable reading and vile reading. Pictures alone would not suffice; they had to know, or imagine, a young girl consuming Daudet’s *Sapho* in order to understand one kind of reading as wholesome and the other as dangerous. In “An Honored Grandmother,” by contrast, the physical differences between the black and white granddaughters are far more pronounced, and the meanings being assigned to the act of reading have changed significantly. Turn-of-the-century readers did not need to know (and might not have cared) just what the grandmother was reading to her grandchild; that she was reading to her was evidence enough of her deserved honor. Reading is no longer the dangerous act it was for her at age thirteen but a means of

intervening in the space that exists between infancy and that first set of moral distinctions – a way to ensure that for the granddaughter, there will *only* be an honorable path.

Both versions of “An Honored Grandmother” distinguish her from the outcast by tying her to reproduction and the family. This tie is twofold: the grandmother produces children and grandchildren that the outcast will not, and, through them, reproduces the cultural work of good reading. The male versions of “The Two Paths” also oppose the lonely outcast to the successful grandfather, but these endings differ from the women’s. In three of the four stages of the woman’s shameful descent, she is accompanied by men (in the first, she is holding *Sapho*). The man’s path to failure, however, is characterized in part by a *lack* of women, beginning with masturbation and ending with a scene of him in what could be a hospital, asylum, or almshouse, surrounded by other degenerates. The male paths are also classed quite differently from the female. Whereas the female outcast wears hats and other accessories that mark her as middle class, the man in the bottom-left image who is a “moral and physical wreck” appears, in this frame as well as the one above, to be a financial wreck as well. In contrast, the path to male success is one that the text associates with economy, thrift, and business. By the age of sixty, the grandfather is taking a “well needed rest” from this work. Like the honored grandmother, he is pictured with a grandchild, but where the grandmother sits reading to the young girl, the grandfather holds the boy (not unlike he would a book) in order to look directly at *him*. Their gazes return one another instead of coinciding upon an external object. Whatever is being shared in this cross-generational moment, it is not the same bond of reading that seems to conclude the honorable path for women.

But the male versions of “The Two Paths” do not just end by providing a different message about the meaning of reading. They commence this way too. The girls’ paths began by distinguishing between two different kinds of reading, an act that is absent altogether from the boys’. “Cigarettes and Self Abuse,” which fills the space occupied by “Bad Literature” in the girls’ versions, sets the boys down the “wrong” path in different ways that are related to, though still quite different from, reading illicit novels. Like the reference to *Sapho*, cigarettes and masturbation bespeak dangers of uncontrolled, nonreproductive sexuality as they give the boys in the left column the initial push on the path to their doom. But this very important first step in the wrong direction has little to do with reading. Even in “Study and Cleanliness,” where the thirteen-year-old’s respectability is tied to the book, he is, importantly, not reading it but holding it proudly while focusing his gaze forward. In these images of male adolescence, the book, like the cigarette and the penis, functions as an object capable of shaping a young man’s future. In a way similar to the granddaughter, who also held a book she presumably did not read herself, its mere presence is enough to indicate the boys’ progression down the right path. By the time he reaches old age, the book is gone; given its associations with work and economic success, it has no place in a scene depicting the grandfather’s “well needed rest.”

In “The Two Paths,” then, the book as a desired object and reading as a profitable or dangerous activity were assumed to function differently for men and women in adolescence as well as old age. At these two stages, which correspond to the starting and ending points of “The Two Paths,” female identity is tied to reading much more strongly than male. For the adolescent girl, reading was not an alternative to sexuality, but a

potential means of experiencing pleasures that paralleled those of male “self abuse.” The term *adolescent* was not in common circulation in 1903, but it would be just one year later with the publication of G. Stanley Hall’s *Adolescence*.<sup>29</sup> Hall relied on the work of Charles Darwin to construct this stage of an individual’s life in direct relation to the life of the species. Jeffrey Moran explains that for him, “adolescent chastity not only signified the social distance between ‘civilized’ and ‘primitive’ races, it *created* this distance.”<sup>30</sup> Puberty was a biological stage experienced by all members of the human race. Adolescence, on the other hand, was a cultural response to sexual maturity. In effect, Hall’s *Adolescence* and “The Two Paths” reflect very similar notions of the child as the key to the race. The distance that adolescence creates to separate the “primitive” from the “civilized” is represented visually by two diverging paths, composed primarily of images and separated from one another by written text (a signifier for civilization). Adolescence is not a particular stage of life so much as it is the gulf between the two paths, the moment at which the space below infancy ceases to be blank and begins to structure itself for adulthood. Writing for *Public Libraries* in 1906, Isabelle Lawrence echoed this view for fellow librarians when she characterized life between 8 and 14 years of age as “the transition period...sometimes called ‘the dark age.’”<sup>31</sup> With this label, Lawrence not only racialized adolescence by linking it to darkness, but recalled a historical moment from which the “civilized” races chose to take one of two paths. Out of a personal Dark Age, the adolescent could either choose to progress into a modern, moral adult, or return to a state of infantile savagery.

In 1905, G. Stanley Hall delivered a speech to the National Education Association entitled “What Children Do Read and What They Ought to Read.” Although much of

Hall's work centered on the adolescent male, in this speech he admitted that it was young women whose reading habits he found most troubling. He argued that whereas boys read far less immoral literature than adults might have predicted, girls indulged in ludicrous, sentimental literature in a manner akin to addiction. This news could not have been shocking to his audience of teachers, for it merely restated fears that had circulated for years. In 1898, A *New York Times* article entitled "The Reading of Children" reported that the research of J.E. Russell, a professor at Columbia University's Teacher's College, "has shown conclusively that girls read more than boys of corresponding age, although their tastes were not as high as those of the boys."<sup>32</sup> Russell also framed his discussion of young readers in sexualized language, where "[u]p to the age of fourteen the reading of a child is promiscuous. Whatever comes to hand he or she reads, but this is the formative period, and before long they settle down pretty definitely to one class of reading." For both Russell and Hall, the fourteen-year-old girl appeared more susceptible to "settling down" with a poor class of literature than her male peer.

These fears shaped female readers in adulthood as much as in adolescence. In "The Two Paths," for example, reading becomes the work of the grandmother – a task from which the grandfather is relieved. This sense that adult women, whether parents, grandparents, or working professionals, would be the agents to select books for children and to guide their reading also became a part of the public library's mission in this period. When L.E Stearns told a group of Wisconsin librarians in 1902 that "[n]o greater problem confronts the librarian than the problem of the book for the girl," she constructed the "problem" as a shared one, between herself, her fellow librarians, and the girls they tried so hard to serve.<sup>33</sup>

## Conclusion

In both *Social Purity* and *Golden Thoughts on Chastity and Procreation*, “The Two Paths” constructs reading as a specifically feminine activity. These plates work, furthermore, by creating a narrative of family and reproduction through which “good” reading travels from one generation to the next. It should be noted that in no version of “The Two Paths” is the young boy or girl in the bottom-right panel specifically labeled as the grandchild of the honored grandmother or grandfather. But what other readings do these texts make available to their readers? Knowing that the virtuous path concludes in grandparenthood, we are in a position to fill in that final, obvious but all-important blank. Reading these images, whether in their original contexts or excised and placed side-by-side for comparative purposes, is not a passive process. The messages generated by “The Two Paths” in particular and by advice literature more generally require active participation in order to fulfill their ideological work. The more unnoticed or intuitive that process seems – the fewer alternatives readers see to interpreting that child as the grandson or granddaughter – the more effectively it is working. But it is *work* nonetheless. How, then, did audiences of the Gibsons’ manuals, or other prescriptive texts, meet with and understand literature they consumed? How do readers read? These questions are not ones I could hope to definitively answer but are worth raising, if only to acknowledge the ways they shape my discussion of *Golden Thoughts* and *Social Purity*. They also inspire my shift of focus, in the next chapter, to public librarianship. Where “The Two Paths” made possible a narrow, detailed analysis of several scenes of reading, I turn to the library as a space in which such scenes became institutionalized.

My goal is not to follow the trail of “The Two Paths” until it leads me into a particular library setting, but to approach the questions these images raise about the meanings of reading from a broader perspective, one that includes the public library in its field of vision. Without conflating the work of librarians with that of authors like the Gibsons or J.L. Nichols as a publisher, I want to make connections between librarianship and other literary professions, for the divisions between different kinds of readers and different kinds of workers were not as absolute as we might think. With a glance at *The Story of My Life and Work* and other titles published by Nichols & Co. and similar outfits, it becomes clear that the distinctions between readers, sellers, and buyers were quite fluid at the turn of the twentieth century. Many products announced in their first few pages that they were only available through subscription, bestowing to customers a sense of exclusivity and privilege. Frequently, these same books would have “Agents Wanted” stamped right on their title pages. This alerted readers to the fact that the book in their hand did not only offer entertainment or advice on a given subject, but included them more generally in the publishing process. Customers were potential sales agents and vice versa, and profits depended in part upon “reader” remaining a malleable category.<sup>34</sup>

James Lawrence Nichols himself worked as a book canvasser while pursuing his college degree, before becoming a professor in Naperville. It was this later profession that led him to write and eventually publish his own business textbooks, marking the beginnings of Nichols & Co. These were careers than Nichols seems to have juggled for much of his adult life, not making strict distinctions between his teaching and his business but conceiving of both of them as educational operations. Naperville, Illinois did not have a public library while Nichols was alive; it was he who in 1895, on his deathbed,

bequeathed \$10,000 to the town to build one, which it did three years later.<sup>35</sup> Although Naperville's library has since outgrown this original structure, the city has made a concerted effort to preserve its memory. The new main library building contains a scale model of the first Nichols Library in its foyer, complete with miniature books, a steam radiator, and a portrait of its namesake. For its centennial celebration in 1998, the Naperville Public Library even staged a reenactment of the opening of the Nichols building (at which, reportedly, all three-hundred or so attendees were requested to donate their own books to beef up the library's collection). If Nichols & Co. has slipped into obscurity, its founder and the library he made possible are continually memorialized by the city of Naperville.

While most librarians neither made nor sold books, Nichols' story suggests that he saw ties between their mission and his own. In the next chapter, I look at the ways public libraries entered the realm of book distribution (already populated by publishing and canvassing operations like Nichols & Co.) in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. During this period, library service not only expanded into new parts of the country but changed significantly in character. Questions of the place of fiction in library collections, open versus closed stacks, and service to children all circulated in the professional library literature as well as in magazines aimed at a more general – though still educated, middle-class – audience. As in “The Two paths,” the child reader became something of a lightning rod, or an incredibly strong magnet, around which these stories converged and struggled for dominance.



## CHAPTER II

### PUBLIC LIBRARIES AND CONSUMER LESSONS

“The time has passed when a library was simply a storehouse; it is now rather a marketplace where all may come to get mental food and pleasure.”<sup>36</sup>

“A good many years ago in those dark ages when the ideal of most public libraries was that they were places to gather and *preserve* books – what their ideal is now is another story, but it is not that – in a certain library in a certain city a legend, writ large, ran thus: ‘Children and dogs not allowed.’”<sup>37</sup>

These quotations – both from magazines targeting middle-class readers in the Northeast – characterize the American public library as a changing (or changed) institution.<sup>38</sup> The first comes from an 1896 article in *The Literary World*, a Boston-based “monthly review of current literature.” The author of this unsigned piece, entitled “Public Library Limitations,” elaborates on some of the problems of “space, means, and administration” that hinder the operation of this quickly-expanding institution.<sup>39</sup> The second quotation also presents the public library as a space of new problems and possibilities, but its author (Theresa Hubbell West Elmendorf – then President of the New York Library Association) turns the focus of her *Chautauquan* readers to the subject of children, who, once forbidden from entering most public libraries, were quickly becoming a, if not *the*, primary target of library work in the early twentieth century. If the author of “Public Library Limitations” ends the piece convinced that the library’s aim should be to become “equal in usefulness to the other great educational power, the public

school,” Elmendorf leaves the question of what the library is or should be doing entirely – ominously – ambiguous.<sup>40</sup>

While these two authors seem to agree upon a vision of the nineteenth-century library as a placid storehouse, they characterize the “new” library quite differently, one casting it as a metaphoric marketplace, the other as a resource for a newly-welcome juvenile clientele.<sup>41</sup> The relationship between these two trajectories is further complicated by a third comment, delivered by Grace Blanchard to a group of New York librarians in 1906 and later printed in *Public Libraries* for a wider professional audience. In her address, Blanchard made clear that among the lessons children learned from the public library was that while they were entitled to a place within its walls, others were not: “The dachshund is not allowed in the building any more than the black and tan. No, only the trustee’s dog is allowed in!”<sup>42</sup> Though she claimed to be making a point about the library’s “democratic atmosphere,” which taught children that all were entitled to service and none would be excused for misbehavior, this quip in fact betrays a more complicated set of expectations and potential lessons.<sup>43</sup> Blanchard’s re-tooling of Elmendorf’s “children and dogs” legend introduced issues of both race and class to the question of who was or was not considered part of the “public” being served at this time. It did so, furthermore, through a pun: in the early twentieth century, the “black and tan” or “black-and-tan” could refer to a type of terrier, a cocktail mixture of stout and ale, or the composition of some southern Republican political groups.<sup>44</sup> The joke, it seems, was that despite the seemingly fitting pair of the terrier with the also-forbidden dachshund, the other two referents were never completely absent or even improbable. Indeed, both stood in metonymic relation to groups of library users – the “black and tan” drink referencing

Irish immigrants and “black and tan” politics standing for African Americans – in ways that make far more sense considering the questions of literacy, character, and service that accompanied library work at this moment. Blanchard, in her final line about the trustee’s dog, tried to drive home the canine association of “black and tan” by insisting that she was only ever talking about dachshunds and terriers. But this punch line cannot – and, I would argue, could not for her audience – completely dispel the messy issues of race and class that she had already put on the table.

What is interesting about this particular comment – especially in relation to the rest of Blanchard’s talk/text – is that it sets up different ideals of what adult librarians and child patrons should know. Whereas the other lessons she describes (e.g., general good behavior, respect for city property) are assumed to be passed from librarians to children as facts, the dog scenario seems to imply just the opposite: that librarians should teach children that all are welcome in a space where “the chinchilla muff is laid on the reading table beside the woolen mitten,” even though they know that this is not, in fact, how the public library operates.<sup>45</sup> The comment about the trustee’s dog certainly seems to have been designed to generate a laugh of recognition from other librarians – well aware that they, too, must occasionally bend the rules for a member of the board. It is a sarcastic conclusion in which the adult world is charged with creating and enforcing rules it cannot afford to live by. Returning to the initial pair of quotations, the question becomes: how did these rules manifest themselves in the public library at the turn of the twentieth century? How did the library-as-children’s-space and library-as-marketplace coincide and, following Blanchard, what “lessons” were disseminated when they did?

I want to be clear: questions like these are not completely absent from recent scholarship on public libraries, on children, or on consumption. There is, for instance, a growing body of secondary literature on the child consumers in this period, as well as a corpus of professional library literature from the turn of the century which poses again and again the question of how librarians are, or ought to be, serving children. Simply put, my point in this chapter is that these two bodies of thought, practice, and writing, have something to say to one another.<sup>46</sup> The child simultaneously emerged as a library patron and a consumer in ways that challenge any strict division between the public library and marketplace. Librarians, even as they stressed the “free” nature of the books they circulated, seized upon tactics and tools of the private sector to attract patrons and guide their taste in reading material. Likewise, producers and distributors of consumer goods depended upon the work of public libraries to secure for themselves both a present and future base of willing buyers.

My inquiry rests on something of a triangulated structure of childhood, consumer culture, and the public library as they intersected around the turn of the twentieth century. What binds these notions, in my mind, is the reading processes itself, construed broadly enough so as to include not only a reader’s engagement with a given text, but the mechanisms by which *that* reader connected with *this* text in the first place. In the early twentieth century, as today, an individual act of reading was subject to a complicated set of forces, some quantifiable (at least in theory) and others far from it. An example of the former would be the very real changes in printing technology that enabled the rise of mass-market books and story papers in the early nineteenth century, and which, by the turn to the twentieth, had made possible the “fiction factories” that poured out story after

story.<sup>47</sup> On the other end, there is a far more mysterious question of desire (“what do people get out of the stories they consume?”) which haunts most cultural studies of popular reading.<sup>48</sup>

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the library entered this scheme as, appropriately, a middle man: a way of connecting the public to the books it wanted to read. Consequently, my aim is neither to present a solid statistical picture of literary consumption in this period, nor is it exactly to uncover the secrets of readers’ desires. Rather, by focusing on the public library as a relatively new means of actively distributing literature (as opposed to storing it), I hope to get at a slightly different – observable, if not fully knowable – part of the process that, taken as a whole, I have been calling “reading.” As a physical space for the consumption of “mental food and pleasure,” the public library sustained a multivalent and often contradictory relationship to the world of consumer goods and practices. It will be necessary, then, to track several different links between the library and consumption. One has to do with the act of reading itself, in which individuals or groups engage with a given text. Arthur Penn, for instance, drew a distinction between reading and consuming texts. For him, the difference had everything to do with the quality of the literary work being consumed. Regarding cheap fiction, he wrote, “it is not fair to call the consumers of this stuff readers,” for “they read with the eye alone, while the brain is inert.”<sup>49</sup> The charge here is one of passivity, and Penn was certainly not alone to think that reading, in order to be valuable, needed to be an active process. Several different metaphors were mobilized to drive home this point, almost always in the context of describing children’s, not adult’s, relationships to books

and reading. The most popular by far was the notion of the book as nourishment and the reading process as eating, digesting, in short, *consuming*.<sup>50</sup>

In *Psychoanalysis and the Scene of Reading*, Mary Jacobus notes that readers and reading have often been, and continue to be, described using the language of food: “We speak (excessively) of voracious readers, of devouring books, of browsing in a library, and so on.”<sup>51</sup> In the case of child readers, these metaphors reflect a general sense that children are never merely eating or reading in the present. Instead, they are being nourished with information that will help them in the future. This allows, on the one hand, for discussions of reading that focus on the content, or character, of books, comparing their values to the nutritional value of foods. Calling love stories “the chocolate chips of literature,” one mother reasoned in 1917 that “while they would make babies sick, a child of seven or eight would not suffer from eating a few, and older children could eat more without disaster.”<sup>52</sup> As they grew, children became able to digest different stories in much the same way as they did different foods. By 1920, the connections between reading and eating were so well-established that *The Bookman* could publish “Dietary Laws of Children’s Books,” an article riddled with terms like “book indigestion,” “fuel values of books,” and “literary flatulency.”<sup>53</sup> In this piece, the nutritional analogy became an argument for censorship: if laws protected the food we eat, so too should they protect the books we read.

While the “scientific” discussions of reading as eating concentrated primarily on the content of the material being ingested, there were also writers for whom the acts of reading became the main concern. Here, the work for professionals like teachers and librarians proved trickier, since the “bad reading” in question referred not so much to the

material being read as to the child doing the reading. The “omnivorous” reader was to be applauded in ways that the “insatiable” one could not. Adults seemed to fear not only that young readers would encounter harmful material, but that reading, whatever the content, could grant them access to pleasures they were not supposed to know. Not surprisingly, these were often described as the pleasures of sex. Books were not just tools for children; they were companions. And while some authors treated these relationships as strictly platonic, others made the parallel between reading choices and sexual choices quite explicit.<sup>54</sup> In 1901, the same year that J.E. Russell described the reading of children under fourteen as “promiscuous,” Richard Burton wrote that “the world of children loves a story as the grown-up world is said to love a lover.”<sup>55</sup> A few years later, psychologist G. Stanley Hall merged the language of reading, eating, and sex completely in his landmark study *Adolescence*:

The reading passion may take rage with great intensity when the soul takes its first long flight in the world of books.... Some specialized, and with some the appetite was omnivorous.... The night is often invaded and some become ‘perfectly wild’ over exciting adventures or the dangers and hardships of true lovers.<sup>56</sup>

The widespread discourse of books as food and reading as eating typically casts literary consumption as an essentially private act, taking place between the body of a reader and a body of literature.

While the public library certainly facilitated these kinds of interaction, it is also necessary to note the more macro-level ways in which libraries participated in the rising culture of consumption. The public library was, and is, both a purchaser and distributor of books. The self-evidence of this fact only makes it more curious that historians of the book, the library, and consumer culture have neglected to pay direct attention to the

public library's role in American consumer society. For the purposes of this chapter, I want to distinguish between two kinds of consumption that became integral to the operation and growth of public libraries from the late nineteenth century through World War I. One depended upon the library's rising status as a market force capable of putting older institutions like subscription-based mercantile libraries out of business and of shaping the decisions made by publishing houses. The other form of consumer activity came at the user level, and probably falls more in line with how we view the rise of the American consumer in the early twentieth century: a shopper faced with a seemingly infinite choice of goods and services. It is within in this second set of relations that I hope to place the child reader/patron.

#### Changes in Librarianship

Before turning to the ways that the public library of the turn of the century fashioned itself as a market place, a children's space, or something both and in between, it makes sense to look at the model of librarianship which preceded either of these. In truth, the transition that Elmendorf and the anonymous *Literary World* author both reference took place quite suddenly, for the American public library had only existed for a few decades at the time both were writing. Although subscription and circulation libraries had thrived in east coast cities since the colonial era (Benjamin Franklin's Library Company was an example of the former), it was the opening of the Boston Public Library in 1854 that inspired cities across the northeast to establish their own municipally-supported institutions. By 1875, 188 communities sustained libraries with public funds, but this was just the beginning.<sup>57</sup> The American Library Association met for the first time in 1876 and published the first issue of *The Library Journal* later that year.



Between 1886 and 1920, almost 1,700 new library buildings in about 1,400 different towns and cities were built with funds from Andrew Carnegie alone.<sup>58</sup> By the end of this period, however, the movement which began with booming missionary enthusiasm had lost much of what the older generation had called the “library spirit.”<sup>59</sup> When the last Carnegie grant was given in 1917, it was not because the money had run out, but because there were no new communities requesting his support.

The period between 1876 and 1920 does not represent a sort of “rise and fall” of the public library so much as it does era in which it became a part of everyday American life and, accordingly, one in which its leaders struggled to define themselves and their profession. The rapid growth in the number of libraries was accompanied by an equally significant shift in their character. Dee Garrison describes the early New England libraries as “genteel settings” managed by men of the Boston elite.<sup>60</sup> Approaching the twentieth century, however, librarians began to redefine their work in ways that anticipated the quotations that open this chapter. The rhetoric of the “old” library versus the “new” framed itself in several ways, but two bear particular importance to my argument: first, librarians in this period became increasingly concerned with circulating rather than merely housing their materials; second, those librarians were more and more likely to be women.

Janice Radway has shown how the idea of the mass-produced, “circulating book” challenged an older “literary” discourse that characterized the book as a symbol of permanence and status, largely outside of capitalist exchange. The circulating book, as its name suggests, lacked the aura of permanence accorded to the literary book. It was to be bought (cheaply), used, and then put aside (or thrown away). While her study focuses on

the Book-of-the-Month Club, established by Harry Scherman in 1926, public librarianship responded to some of the same realities of book production. As technological advances of the late nineteenth century increased the output of printed materials, it became impossible to conceive of the librarian as one man who held the key to his collection. Instead, librarians like Melvil Dewey and Charles Cutter developed classification systems through which large collections of titles could be organized according to universal rules.<sup>61</sup> These schemes changed the nature of the library's collection by arranging books by subject matter rather than some other criterion (the most common practice had been to shelve them in the order they were acquired). New standards of classification made library collections more intuitive and accessible for library users. In turn, libraries began to establish "open stacks" that allowed patrons to browse for books directly rather than filling out paging slips to request a title from behind closed doors.

Commentary from the early 1900s indicates that librarians applied the concept of "circulation" to themselves at least as much as to their books. In 1901, Melvil Dewey, characterized the "old-time" librarian as "little more than a porter or janitor, a mere jailer of books."<sup>62</sup> The new library worker, in contrast, was an active agent of distribution. A few years later, Sam Foss made plain the connection between libraries and currency: "A dollar bill that never circulates is not worth as much as a copper cent that keeps moving. Nearly every librarian ought to double the circulation of his books and treble the circulation of himself."<sup>63</sup> But such calls were not without their opponents; many librarians continued to view the world of books and the world of goods as distinct from one another. As early as 1897, Edward Holden was warning his colleagues not to conflate

circulation with success. “It is assumed,” he wrote, “that any and every library is doing its best service when its books have the maximum circulation.” As distasteful and unfortunate as Holden considered this state of affairs, even he had to admit its inevitability, describing it as “‘modern,’ and all the more dangerous because it is partly true.”<sup>64</sup>

The “dangers” of circulation Edward Holden referenced were strongly gendered at the turn of the century. In *A Feeling for Books*, Radway argues that the circulating book was seen as a distinctly feminine product since women made up the primary audience of low-cost, low-quality fiction. She also notes that around the turn of the twentieth century, it was not just the mass-produced books but also the mechanisms through which these books were disseminated that assumed a feminine character. This claim is substantiated by the changing demographics of the library profession during this period. As Dewey’s and Cutter’s classification systems made libraries more navigable for readers, they also altered the expectations of librarians’ expertise. It was no longer as necessary – and, indeed, sometimes deemed harmful – to aim for comprehensive knowledge of a library collection; far more important was a practical understanding of the tools one would use to classify and subsequently find works within it. From an occupation for male scholars, librarianship became a vocation characterized more by routinized clerical work and public service – in other words, a field of work considered quite suitable for women. Where women made up only twenty percent of the library workforce in 1870, they held eighty-eight percent of all library jobs in America by 1920.<sup>65</sup> These new librarians did not give up all claims to cultural authority, but their claims began to take a different form from those of the genteel male elite Dee Garrison

describes. The earlier model of public librarianship stressed the custodial nature of the librarian's relationship to his collection and allowed librarians largely to disavow their ties to the world of capitalist goods. On the other hand, the newer, "people-centered" character of the profession emphasized the librarian's relationship with and responsibility toward the reading public.<sup>66</sup> In so doing, it placed library workers squarely within the exploding realm of consumer culture. Librarians may not have produced books, but they worked to produce something just as crucial to the success of any literary venture: good readers.

Public librarians targeted their efforts at several populations at this moment (particularly the urban immigrant and poor), but reserved the most concern and fervor for their work with young readers. In ways that resonate with the final panel of "The Two Paths" for women, female librarians became uniquely charged with guiding the reading practices of children; often, they complicated the paths' dualistic logic only slightly. In 1911, for instance, Caroline Burnite of the Cleveland Public Library warned that "good books" lists always represented narrow judgments, and were therefore incomplete and contested. Following this more nuanced critique of prescriptive lists, Burnite presented her own model classifying not books, but their readers. For her, the former demanded the individual attention of librarians, and could only be judged thereafter; children, on the other hand, she grouped into categories labeled *A* through *F*, bearing descriptions such as "Boys and girls whose reading is judiciously guided at home" and "Boys and girls whose reading has been cheap literature containing false views of life."<sup>67</sup> Burnite contended that "[i]t is obvious from the classes indicated that there are two main divisions of children ... children whose reading interest must be aroused, and children whose reading interest

should be directed.”<sup>68</sup> Ironically, the non-reading child posed fewer problems for the librarian than the reader, who, Burnite, argued, was usually caught in the cycle of reading cheap literature. In neither case did the librarian create an interest in reading. This was assumed to rest within the child. The librarian worked either to arouse what lay dormant (a rather straightforward task, if she possessed the proper skills) or to re-direct the child’s tastes (a more difficult and more important project).

Up until the late nineteenth century, most public libraries in the United States remained closed to children. In the mid 1870s, more than seventy percent of them denied entry to anyone under the age of twelve (occasionally, the cut-off was fourteen).<sup>69</sup> There are conflicting reports as to when the first libraries began developing systematic and separate services for child readers, but in general, the Minneapolis Public Library is credited with being the first to separate juvenile books out from their adult collection in 1889.<sup>70</sup> The next year, librarians at the Brookline Public Library just outside of Boston opened the first children’s room in the basement of their building.<sup>71</sup> Other libraries followed suit by converting unused, usually sequestered rooms into spaces to house materials for children. After the turn of the century, however, most librarians took a different attitude to children’s services. In her study of Carnegie libraries, Abigail Van Slyck describes the shift as it related to the design and décor of spaces for young patrons:

Instead of seeing the children’s room as a means of minimizing the adverse effect of children on the library, librarians increasingly considered the children’s room as an opportunity for maximizing the library’s positive impact on the child.<sup>72</sup>

Children did not just become a legitimate clientele for the public library; increasingly, they became the stated reason for its existence. An 1898 *Ladies’ Home Journal* article named children’s books “the first necessity” of the any village library, and it was only

one of many to argue for the primacy of children's collections and services.<sup>73</sup> By 1907, one Brookline librarian even spoke of "the over emphasis and false emphasis" on providing juvenile literature, although Garrison has noted that these warnings were likely lost among the effusive praise for children's work.<sup>74</sup>

The entrance of women and children into the library as workers and patrons, respectively, along with the growing concern for circulation, form the two historical threads for a discussion of how the library helped children become responsible consumers at the same moment that institutions like the department store and mail-order catalog imparted these values to the adult public. In her 1996 article "The Lady and the Library Loafer," Van Slyck argues that "[a]llowing readers direct access to the books and providing service to children were two of the most important innovations associated with the social reform efforts of the public library."<sup>75</sup> This assessment seems to jibe with the pair of quotations from *The Literary World* and *Chautauquan*, but it, too, maintains the separability of the library's transition into a consumer-friendly space from its transition into a kid-friendly one. My question is: didn't these two things have everything to do with one another?

#### The Library as Marketplace

The public library did not simply "become" part of marketplace culture sometime in the late 1800s. Though the structure of the library and the type of services it offered certainly changed in the second half of the nineteenth century to resemble and reflect the rise of consumer culture, it would be unfair to characterize these transitions as sudden shifts in value or as evidence that the public library had been completely cut off from the market in its early years of development. Thomas Augst, in his study of young men's

mercantile libraries in the latter nineteenth century, cautions against viewing these private institutions as transitional structures, falling somewhere between circulating rental libraries (which have their own, long history) and the public libraries quickly coming into view.<sup>76</sup> It is a point well taken, and I do not mean to imply that the municipally-supported public library represents the pinnacle of some evolutionary progression. Nevertheless, public libraries did not arise from nowhere, nor did they enter a completely barren landscape of book distribution in the major northeastern cities. Given that mercantile libraries played a key part in this existing landscape, it is necessary to consider the nineteenth-century public library in light of what Augst has argued about the “business of reading” at institutions like the New York Mercantile Library.

One of Augst’s key points is that members of mercantile libraries – primarily young, male clerks who owned and maintained these institutions collectively – conceived of reading not as an escape from the rules of the market, but as a way of understanding those rules and of crafting one’s identity within them. “According to the philosophy of character that was disseminated both inside and outside these libraries,” he writes, “books were the medium of individual development in a civilization organized around the forces of market capitalism: one could become a responsible ethical agent in economic and public life only through the process of reading.”<sup>77</sup> To be sure, there was harmful reading as well as helpful reading; one of the challenges facing the members of mercantile library boards was of adjusting their expectations about what kinds of books could be seen as positive moral influences. By 1870, seventy percent of the books checked out from the New York Mercantile Library were works of fiction,<sup>78</sup> a statistic that by most accounts applied to public libraries as well.<sup>79</sup> Efforts to encourage young men to read more

practical works of non-fiction in their free time ceded to efforts to reconceive of reading (and character) in such a way as to provide a place for the novels these library users would get their hands on, in one way or another.

The conditions under which these mercantile libraries alternately flourished and failed point to the fact that reading was not just a “business,” but a competitive one. Fiction made its way into the New York Mercantile Library not only because novels were, on the whole, far less expensive to purchase than non-fiction or reference works, but because there was a sense among the library board as well as the ordinary subscriber that one’s business could be taken elsewhere: “The library could not remain insulated from the book market in buying rare and valuable standard works; it had to actively compete with it for the same readers.”<sup>80</sup> It wasn’t just booksellers and rental libraries, however, that were providing this “competition” for readers; mercantile institutions in both New York and Boston had to adjust their ideals and operations in order to continue to exist in cities where large public libraries were becoming powerful and popular forces, claiming to provide very similar kinds of character education, to the masses, for *free*. In the end, Augst argues, the New York Mercantile Library did this successfully by becoming more “business-like,” while the Boston library failed to adjust quickly or completely enough to sustain itself. But the fact that one of these libraries stayed in business while the other effectively had its services replaced by the Boston Public Library matters less than the fact that in both cases, the creation of a public library forced the mercantile institutes to adjust the missions and practices of their members-only libraries. The public library did not enter the picture in Boston any more than in New



York with stated commercial interests, but it did create conditions for competition over readers.

Without denying the differences between mercantile and public libraries in this period, I think that Augst's arguments about reading prompt us to view the latter as a part of, rather than distinct from, the world of consumable literary goods. Specifically, he writes that reading "can be commercialized precisely because there are large numbers of people who do it; the public's 'wishes' can be calculated because they seem to follow in a pattern which ... can be analyzed in terms of supply and demand."<sup>81</sup> This language of supply, demand, and desire, is not bound to a specific institution so much as it is to the mechanisms of the consumer marketplace. It is not accidental that the period in which this language began to make sense as a way of conceptualizing reading was also known as the "the library age."<sup>82</sup>

Thomas Augst argues that part of what members of mercantile libraries received for the price of their subscription was a sense that they were part of a community, not just of readers but of owners. Low-level clerks, many of whom could claim to possess very little else, gladly paid monthly dues for the privilege of belonging to and owning a piece of this institution in the present, as well as for any of the benefits, financial or otherwise, their membership promised for the future. For the public library, this sense of community ownership was equally important, though perhaps a greater challenge to generate. After all, many public libraries were not established *by* communities so much as *for* them, by individuals or small groups, who nevertheless expected the larger community to acknowledge the library as a valuable gift, and to show their appreciation with continued support.<sup>83</sup> "Membership" was nothing so well-defined as it was for the mercantile or

other subscription libraries of the time. This opened up a complicated and intertwined set of questions and arguments.

One interesting, if never truly contested issue was the library's status as a "free" institution. In 1893, C.B. Tillinghast, a librarian from Boston, argued in *Forum* that "a good public library is an investment of money that brings a material as well as an educational return," and, on the very next page, that "the modern library, to be of use to the largest number of people, must be free. The smallest fee for the use of books is a fatal obstacle to their general circulation."<sup>84</sup> That same year, librarian Mary Wright Plummer characterized the public library as an ethical dilemma: "At the very outset, it is questioned as to its right to existence. Should there be free libraries? Should people be allowed to think that they can get anything for nothing?"<sup>85</sup> It is not clear, here, whether the real danger is that public libraries *are*, in fact, free, or that citizens are being led to *think* they are. One or the other could be true; Plummer and others ended up constructing a confusing picture in which the library and the books it made available could be viewed as possessions, investments, gifts, or all three.

In the end, the vast majority of librarians agreed that the library, in order to remain attractive to readers, could not charge individual transaction fees, even if that risked allowing the public to believe it could get something for nothing. Librarians like Tillinghast and Plummer struggled to resolve these contradictions, but so too did library users. Jessie Good, writing about traveling libraries for *The Chautauquan*, characterized the "proud mountaineer" for whom these services were designed as both "suspicious and fearful of patronage in these free books."<sup>86</sup> This suspicion was not limited to first-time or, as Good put it, "uncivilized" library users. Anne Wagner, also writing about traveling

libraries, found it necessary to qualify their “free” status to her middle-class readership. Her 1906 article “Free Libraries for Nothing a Year” appeared in *The Ladies’ Home Journal*. “My title may not seem veracious,” she wrote, “and, morally speaking, of course, nothing worth having is obtained without expenditure, but, the ‘nothing’ being translated into ‘no money’ is literally true”<sup>87</sup> (she did not clarify what, if not money, was being expended). For Wagner, however, “no money” did not equal “no relationship to the marketplace.” Rather, she urged her middle-class readers to establish direct links between the library and the department stores they frequented: “Who can resist the chance of buying a good book reduced to ten cents from a dollar? Especially when she knows of a little library almost complete and ready to start on its travels.”<sup>88</sup> Interestingly, this appeal cast the female shopper not as the library patron, but as the librarian herself.

Though it might have insulted some librarians to know that Wagner was comparing their “expertise” to that of the female department store shopper, the sense of the librarian as a purchasing agent was not entirely new or inaccurate. As early as 1881, James Hubbard charged the library with being “largely responsible for both the growth in quantity and the falling off in quality of the novels and stories produced at this time.”<sup>89</sup> This was a charge he repeated in an 1889 article, in which he condemned public librarians for their indiscriminate buying “of “anything above a dime-novel.”<sup>90</sup> In his view, a public library’s decision to carry fiction (of any kind, but especially of what he considered low literary quality) was equivalent to the city government guaranteeing to a theater manager that it would purchase 500 tickets to any play he chose to produce, regardless of quality.<sup>91</sup> Why should the city subsidize worthless or even dangerous amusement? Something of an idealist, Hubbard was entirely wrong to predict that

eventually, librarians and citizens would come to their senses and cast fiction out of their libraries. However, he was correct to characterize the library both as a space of (at least potential) amusement and to insist that, as an “important purchaser” of cheap fiction, it wielded significant market influence.<sup>92</sup>

For Hubbard, writing in the late-1800s, the library’s role as a purchasing agent came with moral obligations to the community. And when the library failed to do its job correctly, when it supplied “evil,” it was the children of the community who suffered the most:

[A] public library can exert a tremendous influence for evil as well as for good. It has the power to poison the minds of the youth of a whole city. There is not a wicked or mischievous doctrine which it might not effectively propagate ... not necessarily from any bad intent on the part of its officers, but thought the simple want of a proper supervision of books bought.<sup>93</sup>

Though it’s not entirely clear whether children were the sole target for this evil or just its most vulnerable audience, Hubbard portrayed them as the innocent victims of librarians’ poor selections. He insisted, further, that the process by which “poison” entered the library collection could not be undone. A book could never be un-bought, or even controlled: locking it up (as many librarians were wont to do) would not “undo the mischief which it has wrought during its freedom.”<sup>94</sup>

Twenty years later, it was not only library critics, but library leaders who spoke of their roles as purchasers. John Cotton Dana of the Newark Public Library wrote that if censorship in the nineteenth century had stemmed mainly from librarians’ sense of their moral duty to furnish good literature, by 1919, it was simply the “outcome of the limited character of every library’s book-fund, and underlies all of a librarian’s book-buying.”<sup>95</sup>

As the comments from Dana and Hubbard make clear, the librarian’s decision to

purchase one title over another formed the basis for another set of consumer decisions: those made by the library patron. For Dana, the stakes seemed much lower than they did for Hubbard. Selective purchasing was a fact of life and part of the librarian's professional identity. But while the rhetorical "evil" of the librarian's purchases might have largely (though never completely) faded from view, the child as an important recipient of the library's work did not.

#### Library Users, Child Consumers

A growing body of recent work has pushed back the "birth" of the child consumer from the post-World War II television generation to the decades surrounding the turn to the twentieth century.<sup>96</sup> Not coincidentally, the years in which some scholars have rooted children's consumption coincide with the spread and professionalization of children's library work. In *Dependent States*, Karen Sánchez-Eppler writes that from the late nineteenth century onward, children came to be valued in "emotional rather than economic terms," but I would argue that the rise of an American culture of consumption at this same moment frustrates any attempt to disentangle the economic from the emotional value of children.<sup>97</sup> Sánchez-Eppler is correct to point out that child-labor laws took juveniles out of the workplace, but this does not necessarily support her claim that children "gradually [lost] their economic importance."<sup>98</sup> It seems more likely that the economic terms in which children were valued *changed* rather than disappeared. If wage labor was now regarded as threat to childhood, consumption increasingly came to be seen as an inevitable and not necessarily terrible part of it. The child-labor laws Sánchez-Eppler cites may have marked the official end of childhood as a time of earning, but they also helped to usher in a new ideal of childhood as a time of spending.

In *Raising Consumers*, Lisa Jacobson describes how public schools – the institutions that effectively replaced the workplace for many children – became imbricated in the world of mass consumption. Through the establishment of school savings banks, teachers, like parents, sought to mold responsible child consumers. Although she does not engage directly with public librarianship in this work, there is every reason to believe that librarians, too, taught lessons of consumption to their young patrons. Catherine Van Horn, in her article “Turning Child Readers into Consumers,” examines how reading became a way for children to interact with and become part of the consumer sphere. Like Jacobson, Van Horn turns to juvenile magazines like *St. Nicholas* in order to study how children encountered advertisements in their leisure reading. She also looks closely at advertising trade publications to see how a magazine like *St. Nicholas* sold its readership to corporate sponsors, establishing, as it were, a circuit of reading and advertising that connected children, reading, and consumption.

Whereas Van Horn and Jacobson are on the lookout for how children and their parents were targeted by brand-name companies of consumer goods, I am more interested in how librarians, a group of professionals developing alongside admen, targeted readers as consumers of, well, more reading material. The link may seem tenuous at first, but a glance through professional library journals of the period makes a strong case for connecting the work of librarians to those in the world of private business (these journals are, in effect, trade publications). In 1907, *Public Libraries* reprinted a talk delivered by Faith Smith, a librarian from Missouri, in which she stressed some of the more practical concerns of library advertising. Specifically, she spoke of the benefits of distributing librarians’ “best books” lists in bookmark form so that young patrons could have easy

access to their recommendations. The cost of such a project, Smith noted, could be offset by directly approaching publishers. The Century Company, for instance, would agree to print up bookmarks if, on the back, they could place an ad for *St. Nicholas* magazine. This was an entirely agreeable arrangement for Smith, who called it “not objectionable and really in keeping with our work.”<sup>99</sup> This example doesn’t necessarily contradict Jacobson’s or Van Horn’s analyses of ads in juvenile magazines, but it does demonstrate that the sphere of influence and dependence of these publications included relations with the public library: *St. Nicholas* sold audiences of children and their parents to its corporate sponsors; Smith advertised *St. Nicholas* to her patrons; the Century Company sold *St. Nicholas* to the public library; and so on.

The job of any public library, as soon as its doors opened to the public, was to create demand. The job of the librarian was to advertise. After all, even if you were giving away “free books for nothing,” you still needed to find people who wanted to take them. Outreach work, Arthur Bostwick wrote, was

very near indeed to one who [wa]s on the outlook for readers, actual and potential. They are sometimes near when they do not seem to be so. They are akin to the so-called ‘general advertising’ which is a reflex of the growing socialization of business. You may notice in the advertising pages of magazines not only publicity intended to direct your attention to Smith’s camera and Jones’s tractors, but also to the merits of cameras and tractors in general. The librarian is trying to interest his community in books in general and in the things that will lead them to books.<sup>100</sup>

The key here is “potential” readers, a category that could include virtually anyone and certainly did include children. As Bostwick framed it in this and other pieces, public library’s mission changed in the early 1900s from serving those patrons who knew they wanted books to read and expected the library to furnish them. In accordance with market principles, the library’s new job was to activate the desire to read in both adults and

children who were unconscious of their own potential identities as library patrons. In a manner akin to a retail or mail-order business, the library needed to convince its public to consume the goods it had to offer.

Bostwick, a librarian from St. Louis, in some ways personified the departure of the public library profession from its older New England ideals. In one article after another, he wrote of the library as a space for consumer experimentation, sometimes resurrecting suggestions of Melvil Dewey's that had been met years earlier with silence and derision.<sup>101</sup> By the second decade of the twentieth century, it seemed less preposterous for a library to market itself, in Bostwick's terms, as a "literary laboratory" for the consumption of books. Browsing, once a practice scorned by librarians and literally forbidden by the maintenance of closed stacks, became the new ideal for book selection, a way of testing and rejecting the library's offerings. The library in turn became a site for testing and rejecting the bookstore's offerings. "One might think," Bostwick wrote in 1913, "that the public library is an institution intended to make the private ownership of books unnecessary. Were it so, there would be little excuse for its existence – still less for supporting it from the public funds."<sup>102</sup> No, the library's goal was to strengthen, not weaken, the bonds created by commodity purchase by making them more reliable, more consistently fulfilling, in a word, more rational. The library became an ideal testing ground not only because these bonds could be made and broken repeatedly, without the risks associated with actual purchase but because, at least according to Bostwick, "by nothing is the desire for personal possession so quickened and aroused as by books."<sup>103</sup>



Young readers, always burdened with the great weight of potential, hopes, and what ifs, became the ideal group in which to incite and manage this desire.<sup>104</sup> In the 1880s, James Hubbard accused librarians not only of supplying kids with evil books, but with creating the desire for this literature in the first place.<sup>105</sup> One way of reading the “new” library, which welcomed both children and fiction much more wholeheartedly than any of the early New England institutions, is not as evidence that the threat of this desire had subsided, but that librarians had developed ways to convince critics that they were capable of managing a desire they worked all the harder to pull to the surface. As a space of arousal as well as rational choice, the public library embodied the contradictions facing twentieth-century consumers. Librarians taught the public to love books and love *having* them, if only for a short time. The publicly-owned store of literature gave readers access to a much wider selection of literature than they could afford personally, ultimately in service of helping them make better decisions about which books they would eventually like to purchase. Borrowing policies accustomed patrons to habitually acquiring and relinquishing books.

What the library offered, when it “threw its doors open to children,” was an opportunity for them to engage with these contradictions on the same terms as adults.<sup>106</sup> Like any other, this opportunity did not manifest itself equally across the board to any child who happened to enter any public library in the country. Race, class, and ethnicity certainly shaped librarians’ expectations of young patrons, and the professional literature occasionally brought these issues into focus.<sup>107</sup> Most librarians, however, seem to have followed Blanchard’s pattern of hinting at these issues, or raising them only to later deny

their presence. More than any other category of identity or difference, it was the language of gender that structured librarians' arguments about child consumption.

In keeping with Bostwick's concept of the library as testing ground, several librarians wrote about the importance of helping children develop and control "habits" of reading and public library use.<sup>108</sup> For them, acts of consumption enabled by the public library did not stand alone, but combined over time and across institutions (e.g., the public school) to create reliable patterns and habits. These patterns worked to rationalize and contain a desire that could otherwise have proved threatening to young readers, but they accomplished this in ways that were highly gender specific. In 1903, Mary Ahern urged fellow librarians "to fasten 'the book habit' on the youthful person in his inquiring years."<sup>109</sup> Her choice of pronouns was not arbitrary; librarians repeatedly cast the boy as uniquely capable of learning to judge books according to rational principles. This gendered language supports Lisa Jacobson's account of the advertising industry, which in the early 1900s began to view boys as ideal consumers.<sup>110</sup> While consumption continued to be coded as feminine, those working in its service saw the white, middle-class boy as capable of amending that association in ways that would only prove profitable. The boy's enthusiasm for juvenile magazines and the products advertised within them was certainly genuine, but by virtue of the fact that he would grow up to embody adult masculine ideals of rationality, innovation, and modernity, he managed to avoid the pitfalls of excess and frivolity that typified female consumption.

Insofar as they presented the library as a potential site of rationalized consumption, librarians also posited the rational child consumer as male. As Bostwick argued for his *Bookman* readers, "[t]here is no minimum age for the book-lover or book-

owner. One may, and should, begin to love books before he knows how to read.”<sup>111</sup> It is striking that Bostwick, a librarian not a book-seller, located the “love” of books in their status as possessions and not texts. Reading fell second in line of his prescriptions for boy consumers. It could be taught later. But how, then, was the young boy to determine which books were worth owning? Invoking a familiar metaphor, librarian Charles Gill urged fathers to “dissect [bad] books for his boy and show him how very little meat they contain and how little he is getting for his money and effort.” Once he did so, “the boy’s very sense of justice would cause him to denounce and reject all such shoddy.”<sup>112</sup> In the quotations from Bostwick and Gill, fathers, sons, and male librarians combine their efforts to make responsible book selections.

Given the extent to which public librarianship in general and children’s services in particular were feminized by this moment, these male librarians’ advice to fathers and sons should be read as an attempt to forge a network of (white, middle-class) male relations centered around the book. To be sure, female librarians like Ahern contributed to the discourse of the young male library consumer. In the *Chautauquan* piece from which I quote above, Ahern turned to masculine pronouns at precisely the moment that she began her discussion of reading habits; in other words, when her article turned to the question of how to guide children to be practical, rational library users. Male librarians likewise concerned themselves with the reading of girls, sometimes alongside that of boys, but also frequently by identifying it as a unique “problem.” So while I am not claiming that librarians concerned themselves exclusively with children of their own gender, the fact remains that Gill and Bostwick, writing in 1913 and 1914, respectively,

addressed present and future male readers as men working in a profession increasingly coded as feminine.

In their writing, Bostwick and Gill constructed a gendered system of guidance parallel to that presented ten years earlier in “The Two Paths.” Unlike that of these earlier illustrations, their advice did not simply contrast the boy’s relationship to the book with “Cigarettes and Self Abuse,” but neither did it consider that relationship in anything but utilitarian terms. The risks involved with girls’ reading, not only in “The Two Paths,” but for other librarians at this moment, simply did not translate across gender. In Gill’s formulation, bad books were bad investments. For Bostwick, the boy’s love for the best book had less to do with his ability to read it than it did his claim to owning it. In neither case did a poor selection carry the dangerous power that it did for the girls in “The Two Paths.” In both, casting the young male reader as a rational consumer provided a way to manage his relationship to books – one not necessarily open to his female peers.

So what became of the girl? Certainly, she did not fall out of the picture. I want to conclude by jumping ahead a few years to *The Child and the Book*, a pamphlet written by Christopher Morley and published by the American Library Association in 1922.<sup>113</sup> In his brief essay, Morley describes meeting a girl reading on a street in Philadelphia, a city whose ties to the library world date back to Benjamin Franklin. She is as young, white, and pure, as the girl who begins her trek down “The Two Paths” in *Social Purity*. Morley spends far more time describing the street – an alley, really – in all “[i]ts humility and pathetic cleanliness” than he does the reader. Edward Smith recreates this emphasis in his cover illustration (Fig. 9) by tucking the girl in a darkened corner of the image.

In the written text of *The Child and the Book*, however, darkness does not attach to the city street, or even to the young girl reading. Instead, Morley describes the object of her attention: “the soiled little book she had shown me was the label of a Public Library.” The logic here is reversed: where we would expect the library to label the book with a stamp or other symbol of ownership, here, the object labels the institution. For Morley, the soiled book was not from the library; it *was* the public library. But the physical dirtiness – of the library book and by extension the library itself – does not diminish his opinion of the young girl, or of the librarian:

A child does not read to criticize or compare, but just in the unsullied joy of finding itself in a new world. To see a youngster reading in the slums is to me the most subtly heart-searching experience I know. And behind every such child is the heart and brain of some teacher or librarian that made the book possible and put it into his hand. That is one thing that librarians do, and it is the greatest thing I know.

This description of the young reader appeared almost twenty years after J.L. Nichols first published “The Two Paths.” In it, the young girl remains a symbol of purity and hope, even as she reads for pleasure rather than for study. She sits alone as other children play, engrossed in her tale. When asked what she reads, she answers that it is a story without being “in the least frightened or abashed.” In this act of unencumbered recreational reading, she presents an alternative “right” path – one that complicates the distinction between good and bad reading by allowing for pleasure.

That distinction between good and bad, while not absent or irrelevant, has been mediated by the librarian. Because the girl reads a book from the public library, Morley does not worry about its content. In fact, he is more or less shut out of this relationship between librarian, child, and book: although “intensely eager” to sit down with the girl, he resists, “half afraid someone would come out of the house and think [he] was a

kidnaper (*sic*).” He longs to connect with her but cannot, outside of recalling the experience for a group of librarians. The literary man is out of place here, for the space between home-life and street-life, between the purity of the child’s mind and the dirtiness of the pages in her hand, belongs to the female librarian.

### Conclusion

Librarian Sam Walter Foss wrote in 1899, “I am sincerely glad that the old type of librarian is passing out – a man so dignified that children were afraid of him ... We want human men ... who can make themselves agreeable to men, women, children, and dogs.”<sup>14</sup> Foss presents a progression of humanity here: we have librarians on one extreme and dogs on the other. His weird insistence on the “human men” (and women) who were to become librarians only calls into question the status of men, women, children, and dogs to whom they must make themselves agreeable. By including “dogs” in the list, moreover, Foss makes clear that all groups are *not* equally welcome, and will not receive equal treatment inside the library. Specifically citing children’s fear of the “old type of librarian,” he also underscores the significance of youth within the new library regime.

This chapter argues that we must view the new significance attached to young readers in light of the library’s deepening relationship to the world of consumer goods. The “passing out” of dignity that Foss relates was tied as much to the inclusion of new groups of library users as it was to the library’s role in the literary marketplace. What emerged as a result was an ideal of rational childhood reading, and childhood consumption, which placed young men at its center. But it was only one ideal. *The Child*

*and the Book* presents another, in which the girl consumes freely and publicly, and, in the process, becomes an object of adult consumption. Both of these visions used gender to connect adults with child readers, but failed to fully recognize and address inequities of race, ethnicity, and social class.

## CONCLUSION

James Kincaid has characterized childhood as “a wonderfully hollow category, able to be filled with anyone’s overflowing emotions.”<sup>115</sup> Hollow maybe, but rarely empty. In this thesis, I inspected some of the contents of this category of childhood – “real” books, images, and articles that imagine the child and thus fill Kincaid’s hollow shell. Karen Sánchez-Eppler embraces age as an identity category because “unlike gender, race, or even class, age is inherently transitional.” Childhood, she writes, “is a status defined by its mutability – a stage inevitably passed through.”<sup>116</sup> While I agree with Sánchez-Eppler that age is a productive analytic tool, I want to insist that this remains true beyond childhood. To assume some solid, unified cast inhabiting the category of adulthood denies its status as under construction while glorifying the flux of youth. These are both imagined categories, and adulthood does not necessarily find itself on more solid ground. I began by deliberately leaving the category of “adult” to be determined. Here are some suggestions:

### Adults

Girls	Women	Readers
Boys	Men	Writers
Young	Old	Sellers
Juvenile	Grown-Up	Buyers
Adolescent	Mature	Wishers
Kids	Parents	Givers
	Workers	Watchers
		Worriers



In her 2006 review article “Women and Reading,” Kate Flint argues that “the image of the woman reader makes the figure an ideal screen onto which all kinds of cultural assumptions may be projected.”<sup>117</sup> In this piece and her 1993 book, Flint explores how women have been constructed, addressed, and molded by many of the same forces that I see trying to manage younger readers. This is not to say that women and children perform the same “screening” functions but that both, when imagined as readers, reflect some larger cultural assumptions and absorb others. While her focus on adult female readership is certainly justified, I fully believe that Flint’s “woman reader” could be replaced by a child reader without rendering her argument any less plausible. Karen Sánchez-Eppler makes this move in *Dependent States*, and finds that children’s acquisition of reading skills in the early and mid nineteenth centuries contributed to a newly coherent and self-conscious discourse of childhood.<sup>118</sup> In the early twentieth century, gender and age continued to shape the expectations of reading, but did so in a context of fully industrialized production and consumption.

By approaching childhood reading in this period with a dual focus – prescriptive literature on the one hand and library literature on the other – I hope to have offered at least a couple of potential sites for further inquiry. Of the two pursued here, the subject of public librarianship most deserves our sustained attention. Libraries and librarians continue to influence children’s educational and social development, but both also continue to slip below the radar of scholars in the humanities. Christine Pawley writes that “the basic insight that power relations are a key to understanding the development of institutions like the public library seems too obvious to mention,” but this does not change the fact that at present, these relations remain largely unstudied.<sup>119</sup> There are

exceptions, of course: Abigail Van Slyck's work on the gendered architecture of public libraries and Julia Mickenberg's recent book *Learning from the Left* are, to my mind, models for future work.<sup>120</sup> Where Van Slyck starts at the library (literally, with blueprints) to analyze the relations of power produced by design, Mickenberg places libraries within a broad context of children's publishing during the Cold War. Both authors take seriously the library's role in twentieth-century America, and both begin to clarify how children figured into its mission at certain historical moments. As I see it, this is the groundwork for forthcoming studies on reading, children, and the history of the American public library (with any luck, *my* groundwork for writing one of them).

FIGURE 1  
HAPPY AND CONTENTED



These two images depicting young readers are both entitled “Happy and Contented.” The top one is found between pp. 202-3 of *Social Purity*; the bottom appears in the same section of *Golden Thoughts on Chastity and Procreation*. Most images in these manuals follow this pattern of rough correspondence. Few are as exact in their resemblance as “The Two Paths.”

FIGURE 2  
 THE TWO PATHS:  
 WHAT WILL THE GIRL BECOME



Plate from *Golden Thoughts on Chastity and Procreation* (1903)

FIGURE 3  
THE TWO PATHS:  
WHAT WILL THE GIRL BECOME?

THE TWO PATHS  
WHAT WILL THE GIRL BECOME?

AT 13  
BAD LITERATURE

AT 20  
FLIRTING—COQUETTERY

AT 26  
FAST LIFE—DISSIPATION

AT 40  
AN OUTCAST

AT 13  
STUDY—OBEDIENCE

AT 20  
VIRTUE—DEVOTION

AT 26  
A LOVING MOTHER

AT 60  
AN HONORED GRANDMOTHER

Copyright, 1903, by J. A. Hertel.

THE above cut represents a beautiful little girl at seven—as pure as a sunbeam—she comes from a fine Christian family. Going to the left you see her at thirteen reading “Sapho,” a vile novel that was suppressed several years ago in New York—it had a bad effect on our model little girl; at nineteen *Flirting and Coquetry*; third stage, a step lower; at twenty-six, *Fast Life and Dissipation*—this tells the sad story; at forty she is *an outcast*—the miserable result of *Social Impurity*.

To the right we have a brighter picture—at thirteen, *Study and Obedience*; next a young lady in church—*Virtue and Devotion*; at twenty-six—*A Loving Mother*—a most inspiring and lovely scene; at sixty—*An Honored Grandmother*.

Plate from *Social Purity* (1903)

FIGURE 4  
THE TWO PATHS:  
WHAT WILL THE BOY BECOME

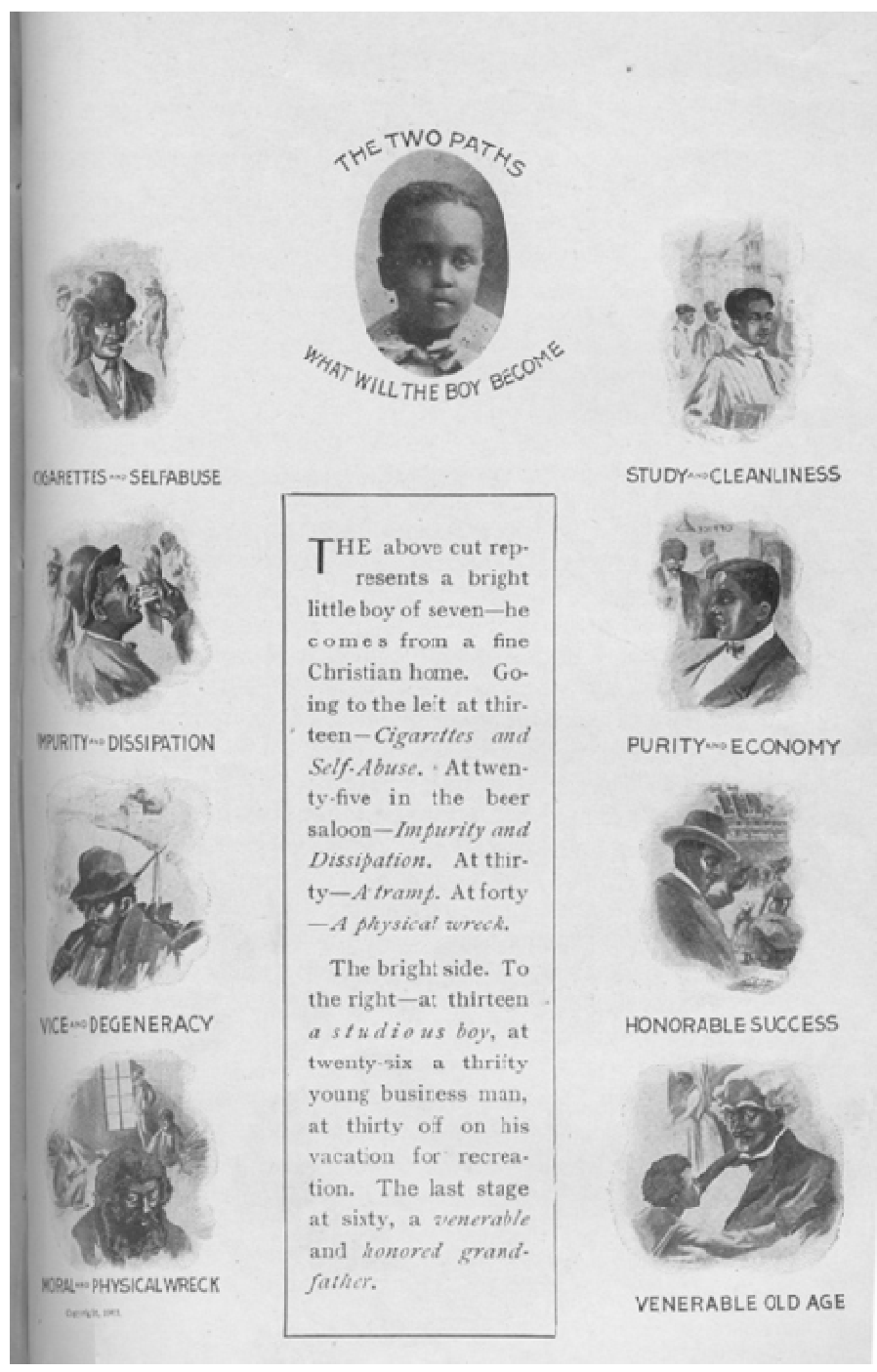


Plate from *Golden Thoughts on Chastity and Procreation* (1903)

FIGURE 5  
THE TWO PATHS:  
WHAT WILL THE BOY BECOME?

THE TWO PATHS  
WHAT WILL THE BOY BECOME?





AT 13  
CIGARETTES—SELFABUSE



AT 13  
STUDY—CLEANLINESS



AT 25  
IMPURITY—DISSIPATION



AT 25  
PURITY—ECONOMY



AT 36  
VICE—DEGENERACY



AT 36  
HONORABLE SUCCESS



AT 48  
MORAL—PHYSICAL WRECK



AT 60  
VENERABLE OLD AGE

THE above cut represents a bright, manly little boy of seven—he comes from a good Christian home. Going to the left, at thirteen he takes to cigarettes, etc. At twenty-five we find him in the beer saloon—*Impurity and Dissipation*. Down lower he goes at break-neck speed—next a tramp—*Vice and Degeneracy*—and finally at the early age of forty-eight—*Moral and Physical Wreck*. How sad yet how true to life.

The bright side. To the right—at thirteen *Study and Cleanliness*; at twenty-five a thrifty young business man—*Purity and Economy*; at thirty-six traveling—off on his summer vacation enjoying, with his family, a well needed rest. At sixty, *Venerable Old Age*.

Plate from *Social Purity* (1903)

FIGURE 6  
INDUSTRY AND IDLENESS



Plate 1: The Fellow Prentices at their Looms (1747)



FIGURE 7  
THE TWO PATHS (1926)



Images from *Safe Counsel* (1926)

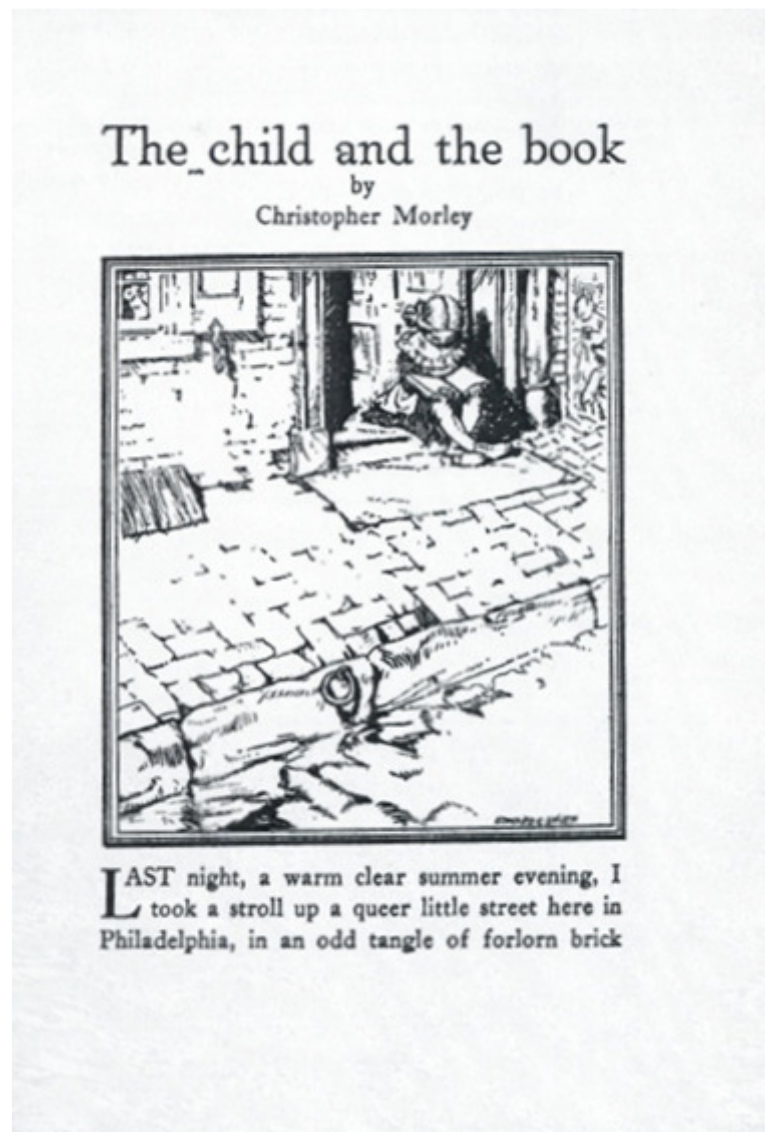
FIGURE 8

HUCKLEBERRY SCIENCE WITH *SOCIAL PURITY*



FIGURE 9

## THE CHILD AND THE BOOK



Cover of *The Child and the Book* (1922).

<sup>1</sup> See Laura Joffe Numeroff's picture books *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* (New York: Laura Geringer Books, 1985), *If You Give a Moose a Muffin* (New York: Laura Geringer Books, 1991), and *If You Give a Pig a Pancake* (New York: Laura Geringer Books, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> "Library Meetings," *Public Libraries* 8, no. 7 (July 1903): 327.

<sup>3</sup> Kate Flint, "Women and Reading," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 31, no. 2 (Winter 2006): 512.

<sup>4</sup> Harvey Sheridan, ed. *American Women: A Library of Congress Guide to the Study of Women's History and Culture in the United States*, (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001): 25. Specifically, the guide characterizes as "rare" Nichols & Co.'s acknowledgement of "the segregation of the day, the growth of the African American book-buying public, and the desire to promote standard values to all." There is a tension here between viewing these books as unique commercial products and as "standard," even hackneyed vehicles for Victorian morality.

<sup>5</sup> Booker T. Washington, *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, edited by Louis R. Harlan, 8 vols. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972): 1:xviii. The History Cooperative, <http://www.historycooperative.org/btw> (accessed January 2, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 1: xix.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 1: xvi.

<sup>8</sup> By April, 1901, Nichols & Co. had distributed about 15,000 copies of *The Story of My Life and Work* and issued a second printing of the work. In 1904, John A. Hertel, general manager of Nichols & Co., claimed to have sold more than 75,000 copies of the book (*Ibid.* 1: xxi).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 1:xx.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 1:xx.

<sup>11</sup> J.W. Gibson and W.H. Croghan, *The Colored American: From Slavery to Honorable Citizenship* (Naperville, IL: J.L. Nichols & Co., 1902). This work appeared in other editions and with different contributors under the title *Progress of a Race*. There is at least one edition of this work in which J.L. Nichols, John William Gibson, and Booker T. Washington all appear as contributing authors: H.F. Kletzig et al., *Progress of a Race, or, The Remarkable Advancement of the Afro-American Negro from the Bondage of Slavery, Ignorance, and Poverty to the Freedom of Citizenship, Intelligence, Affluence, Honor and Trust*. (Atlanta: J.L. Nichols & Co., 1900).

<sup>12</sup> Mary Willis' instructions and contract came not from J.L. Nichols but from the W.H. Ferguson Company of Cincinnati, which released a revised edition of Washington's work in 1901 (Ferguson would also publish an edition *Golden Thoughts* in 1904). Several times, this six-page document gives sellers parenthetical suggestions for "canvassing a Negro." In one case, the instructions get specific enough to request that canvassers describe Tuskegee as "the place for a young man to find a good wife" if talking with an unmarried African-American man (*Instructions*, 1-2).

<sup>13</sup> John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990): 54.

<sup>14</sup> J.W. Gibson, *Golden Thoughts on Chastity and Procreation: Including Heredity, Prenatal Influences, Etc., Etc.* (Naperville, IL: J.L. Nichols & Co., 1903): Introduction.

<sup>15</sup> The titles of these two books signify very differently. Both prescribe chastity, but in the case of *Social Purity*, the stakes transcend the individual and even the family. The "social" nature of (white) purity is more fully revealed in its eugenically-tinged subtitle *The Life of the Home and Nation*. Nichols & Co. literally inserted this phrase into the full title of *Social Purity*; its second subtitle, *Including Heredity, Prenatal Influences, Etc., Etc.*, is identical to that of *Golden Thoughts*. The introductions, to which I have already alluded, continue the work of separating black audiences from white ones. In the end, however, I focus my attention on the imagery of these two books, both because it allows me to analyze four plates depicting child readers and because, more generally, this imagery is the means by which racial difference is infused *through* these books, part and parcel with the written text.

<sup>16</sup> *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. Edited by M.H. Abrams. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999): 1:2653.

<sup>17</sup> William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty*. Edited by Joseph Burke. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1955):

<sup>18</sup> Sander Gilman, "Black Bodies White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth Century Art, Medicine, and Literature," in "*Race, Writing, and Difference*," edited by Henry L.

Gates, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985): 228.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>20</sup> Zine Magubane, "Which Bodies Matter? Feminism, Poststructuralism, Race, and the Curious Theoretical Odyssey of the 'Hottentot Venus,'" *Gender and Society* 15, no. 6 (December 2001): 823.

<sup>21</sup> Although Siobhan Somerville describes this shift in *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), she leaves the question of what motivated this change unanswered. This discussion is forthcoming in Samuel A. Turner, *Secret Identities: Knowledge and the Body in America's Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, in progress).

<sup>22</sup> Somerville, Siobhan B., *Queering the Color Line*, 34.

<sup>23</sup> Kathryn Kent, *Making Girls into Women: American Women's Writing and the Rise of Lesbian Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003): 107.

<sup>24</sup> B.J. Jefferis, *Safe Counsel: Or, Practical Eugenics* (Naperville, IL: J.L. Nichols & Co., 1926).

<sup>25</sup> Given how closely the written text of *Social Purity* and *Golden Thoughts* follow one another, it is curious that the narratives of "The Two Paths" would differ so significantly. It suggests, perhaps, that within the broad category of "illustration," differences that are minimized elsewhere between the two manuals are allowed to assert themselves all the more strongly.

<sup>26</sup> On African Americans and the legacy of illiteracy (and assumptions about illiteracy), see Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002): 4-7.

<sup>27</sup> This discrepancy in age, however slight, continues to manifest itself in the various stages of "The Two Paths." In "Flirting and Coquetry," for example, the written text identifies both women as nineteen-year-olds, but the label attached to the white woman's image reads "at 20."

<sup>28</sup> The text to which these image plates refer appears to be Alphonse Daudet's novel *Sapho: Moeurs Parisiennes* (Paris: G. Charpentier et cie., 1884).

<sup>29</sup> G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education*, 2 vols. (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1904).

<sup>30</sup> Jeffrey P. Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000): 16, emphasis in original.

<sup>31</sup> Isabelle Lawrence, "How Shall Children Be Led to Love Good Books?" *Public Libraries* 11, no.4 (April, 1906): 181.

<sup>32</sup> "The Reading of Children: Interesting Results of Professor J.E. Russell in Western States and Cities." *New York Times*, 6 January, 1898, 6.

<sup>33</sup> L.E. Stearns, "The Book for the Girl." *Public Libraries* 7, no. 9 (November 1902): 408.

<sup>34</sup> Canvassing manuals serve as unique and fruitful sources not only for investigating the publication history of specific titles, but for anyone interested in the questions of how readers (of various kinds: sellers as well as buyers) engaged with books as consumable products. These are sort of ephemeral documents, however, rarely preserved and even more rarely catalogued. I have gotten my hands on only a couple: *Instructions or Drill Key for Selling the Autobiography of Booker T. Washington*; *Instructions to Agents for Fighting the Traffic in Young Girls or War on the White Slave Trade By Ernest A. Bell*; and *Personal Suggestions to Agents on How to Sell Our Juveniles*. The instructions for Washington's work are held in the Special Collections of the University of Virginia Library; the latter two are owned by Northwestern University. F.E. Compton's *Subscription Books* (New York: The New York Public Library, 1939) and Mrs. E.G. White's *Manual for Canvassers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1920) also provide a sense of publishers' expectations of their agents. Perhaps the best source for this information is the online archive for "Agents Wanted," an exhibit designed by the University of Pennsylvania's Rare Book and Manuscript Library (<http://www.library.upenn.edu/exhibits/rbm/agents>).

<sup>35</sup> The information in this paragraph about Nichols and the Naperville Public Library comes mainly from a program produced for the library's centennial celebration: Jane Teague, *The Naperville Public Libraries: Celebrating One Hundred Years of Community Service* (Naperville, IL: Naperville Public Libraries, 1998).

<sup>36</sup> "Public Library Limitations," *The Literary World: A Monthly Review of Current Literature* 27, no. 1 (January 11, 1896): 8.

<sup>37</sup> H.L. Elmendorf, "Great Literature and Little Children," *The Chautauquan* 39, no. 4 (June 1904): 382.

<sup>38</sup> “The” public library, here, and in much of the professional literature I cite, is a term that, even as it claims to encompass public libraries belonging to different kinds of communities and locations, also puts forward a model institution that is urban and northeastern. Articles in publications like *Library Journal* and *Public Libraries*, and *The Chautauquan*, do address the needs and roles of libraries that do not fit this mold (Tillinghast 1893; Good 1902; Dewey 1906). Nevertheless, “the” public library was often assumed to be serving the populations of Philadelphia, New York, Newark, Boston, and other cities in the northeastern United States. In 1909, the American Library Association, which had been founded in Philadelphia in 1876 and chartered in Massachusetts three years later, decided to relocate to Chicago. This relocation of ALA headquarters seems in part to have been an acknowledgement that “the” public library was no longer based in New England – that it would take different forms not only in large cities like Chicago but also in much smaller communities (many of them west of the Mississippi) still working to establish free municipal libraries (“A Look Backward,” 16).

<sup>39</sup> “Public Library Limitations,” 8.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>41</sup> By placing these two comments side by side, I do not mean to imply that the marketplace and the kid’s space were the only ways librarians and other literary professionals characterized the public library around this time. Others included the laboratory (Bostwick, “The Making of an American’s Library”); public amusement (Hubbard, “Are Public Libraries Public Blessings?”); school (Dewey, “The Future of the Library Movement”); and city street (“Books and Reading”).

<sup>42</sup> Grace Blanchard, “The Child and the Public Library,” *Public Libraries* 12, no. 3 (March 1907): 91.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>44</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2d ed., s.v. “black.”; Hanes Walton Jr. and C. Vernon Gray, “Black Politics at the National Republican and Democratic Conventions, 1868-1972.” *Phylon* 36, no. 3. (1975): 272.

<sup>45</sup> Blanchard, “The Child and the Public Library,” 91.

<sup>46</sup> This is a connection that Kay Vandergrift alludes to in her article “Female Advocacy and Harmonious Voices: A History of Public Library Services and Publishing for Children in the United States,” *Library Trends* 44, no. 4 (Spring 1996): 683-718. Vandergrift stresses that women in librarianship and publishing often “worked in concert” to produce and provide reading materials for children. While I work from and greatly appreciate the story that she reconstructs in this piece, my goal is not to build on her history of women in children’s librarianship, but to study the gendered discourses that librarians – both male and female – created in the process of serving children.

<sup>47</sup> Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (London: Verso, 1998): 17-26.

<sup>48</sup> This question has probably been tackled most successfully in relation to more modern readers (Radway, *Reading the Romance*) but it also surfaces in sources like the professional library literature from the late-nineteenth century onward (Tillinghast, “Books and Readers in Public Libraries”; Edwards, “The Literary Cult of the Child”; Lawrence, “How Shall Children Be Led to Love Good Books?”).

<sup>49</sup> Arthur Penn, “Notes on Reading.” *Century Illustrated Magazine* 24, no.1 (May 1882): 154.

<sup>50</sup> This sense of the book as food and reading as eating has made its way into recent secondary literature (Radway, “Reading is Not Eating”; Mailloux, “The Rhetorical Use and Abuse of Fiction”; Gilbert, “Ingestion, Contagion, Seduction”) but I don’t think these discussions really reveal how powerful and widespread these metaphors were among librarians and other literary professionals, so many of whom turned to this language of food when discussing children’s reading practices. See, for example, Greene, “The Relation of the Public Library to the Public Schools”; Hubbard, “Fiction and Public Libraries”; “Books for the Young”; “Public Library Limitations”; Edwards, “The Literary Cult of the Child”; Van, “What Children Read”; Bostwick, “The Making of an American’s Library”; Gill, “Reading for Our Boys and Girls”; Legler, “Library Work With Children”; “Boys and Girls and Reading”; Moses, “Dietary Laws of Children’s Books.”

<sup>51</sup> Mary Jacobus, *Psychoanalysis and the Scene of Reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999): 27.

<sup>52</sup> “Love Stories for Children,” *Public Libraries* 22, no. 2 (February 1917): 53.

<sup>53</sup> Montrose J. Moses, “Dietary Laws of Children’s Books,” *The Bookman* 51, no. 5 (July 1920): 587-591.

<sup>54</sup> The “friend” comparison can be found in both professional literature and advice manuals written for children and adolescents. An example of the latter is Mary Wood-Allen’s *What a Young Girl Ought to Know*, (Philadelphia: The Vir Publishing Company, 1905), although, it should be noted that this book Vir issued this title as part of their “Self and Sex” series.

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- <sup>55</sup> Richard Burton, "Literature for Children," *The North American Review* 168, no. 502 (September 1898): 283.
- <sup>56</sup> G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence* (New York: The Arno Press, 1969): 478.
- <sup>57</sup> Patrick Williams, *The American Public Library and the Problem of Purpose* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1988): 7.
- <sup>58</sup> Abigail A. Van Slyck, *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries & American Culture 1890-1920* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998): 217.
- <sup>59</sup> Editorial, *Public Libraries* 16 (May 1911): 201. For a longer discussion of how this missionary spirit animated librarians at the turn of the century, see Patrick Williams, *The American Public Library and the Problem of Purpose* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1988): 27.
- <sup>60</sup> For more on early public librarians, see Dee Garrison, *Apostles of Culture: The Public Librarian and American Society, 1876-1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003): ch.1 "The Genteel Setting," especially pp. 10-15.
- <sup>61</sup> In the 1870s, Dewey and Cutter developed competing classification systems for library materials. While most public libraries adopted the Dewey Decimal System, Cutter's model was adapted into what we now know as the Library of Congress system of classification. For more on the impact of the Dewey Decimal System, see Garrison, *Apostles of Culture*.
- <sup>62</sup> Melvil Dewey, "The Future of the Library Movement in the United States in the Light of Andrew Carnegie's Recent Gift," *Journal of Social Science* (November 1, 1901): 139.
- <sup>63</sup> Sam Walter Foss, "Some Cardinal Principles of a Librarian's Work," *Public Libraries* 14, no. 3 (March 1909): 80.
- <sup>64</sup> Edward S. Holden, "Great Public Libraries in the United States," *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine* 30, no. 176 (August 1897): 118.
- <sup>65</sup> Mary Niles Maack, "Gender, Culture, and the Transformation of American Librarianship, 1890-1920," *Libraries & Culture* 33, no.1 (Winter 1998): 52.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.
- <sup>67</sup> Caroline Burnite, "The Standard Selection on Children's Books," *The Library Journal* 36, no.4 (April 1911): 162.
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.
- <sup>69</sup> Josephine A. Rathbone, "The Modern Library Movement," *Public Libraries* 13, no. 6 (June 1908): 199.
- <sup>70</sup> *Famous First Facts: A Record of First Happenings, Discoveries, and Inventions in American History*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., Ed. Joseph Nathan Kane, Steven Anzovin, and Janet Podell (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1997): 319.
- <sup>71</sup> "Books and Reading for Young Folk," *St. Nicholas* 27, no. 11 (September 1900): 1025.
- <sup>72</sup> Abigail A. Van Slyck, *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries & American Culture 1890-1920* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998): 179.
- <sup>73</sup> Neltje Blanchan, "The Twentieth Century Village: Third Article – Starting a Village Library," *The Ladies' Home Journal* 15, no. 11 (October 1898): 28.
- <sup>74</sup> Caroline Matthews, "The Growing Tendency to Over-Emphasize the Children's Side," *The Library Journal* 33, no. 4 (April 1908): 136.
- <sup>75</sup> Abigail A. Van Slyck, "The Lady and the Library Loafer: Gender and Public Space in Victorian America." *Winterthur Portfolio* 31, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 239.
- <sup>76</sup> Thomas Augst, "The Business of Reading in Nineteenth-Century America: The New York Mercantile Library," *American Quarterly* 50, no. 2 (1998): 267-305.
- <sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 272.
- <sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.
- <sup>79</sup> Most figures (sometimes acquired through survey, other times just estimations) on public libraries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century show works of fiction accounting for between two-thirds and three-quarters of total circulation (Penn, "Notes on Reading"; Tillinghast, "Books and Readers in Public Libraries").
- <sup>80</sup> Augst, "The Business of Reading in Nineteenth-Century America," 277.
- <sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.
- <sup>82</sup> Melvil Dewey, "The Future of the Library Movement in the United States," 139.
- <sup>83</sup> The question of if and how a community could guarantee long-term support of its library services was clearly an important one. When Andrew Carnegie began donating money toward the establishment of public libraries, cities and towns petitioning for his funds had to pledge an annual contribution equal to ten

percent of the amount given by Carnegie, to be put toward maintaining the library facilities. In his words, “the community which is not willing to maintain a Library had better not possess it. It is not only the feeling that the library belongs to every citizen, richest and poorest alike, that gives it a soul, as it were. The library buildings that I am giving are the property of all the members of the community which maintain them” (Carnegie, Letter to Gentlemen of the Committee). James Lawrence Nichols made a similar stipulation in the will he dictated on his deathbed in 1895, which gave the town of Naperville, Illinois the funds necessary to establish their first public library.

<sup>84</sup> C.B. Tillinghast, “Books and Readers in Public Libraries,” *Forum* (September 1893): 67-68.

<sup>85</sup> “The Free Library as a Factor in the Social Movement,” *Friends’ Intelligencer* 50, no. 40 (October 7, 1893): 629.

<sup>86</sup> Jessie Good, “The Traveling Library as a Civilizing Force,” *The Chautauquan* 36, no. 1 (October 1902): 65.

<sup>87</sup> Anne L. Wagner, “Free Libraries for Nothing a Year,” *The Ladies’ Home Journal* 23, no. 11 (October 1906): 79.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>89</sup> James Mascarene Hubbard, “Fiction and Public Libraries,” *The International Review* (February 1881): 174.

<sup>90</sup> James M. Hubbard, “Are Public Libraries Public Blessings?” *The North American Review* 149, no. 394 (September 1889): 342; 346.

<sup>91</sup> Hubbard, “Fiction and Public Libraries,” 173.

<sup>92</sup> Hubbard, “Are Public Libraries Public Blessings?” 346.

<sup>93</sup> Hubbard, “Fiction and Public Libraries,” 176.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>95</sup> John Cotton Dana, “Public Libraries as Censors,” *The Bookman* 49, no. 2 (April 1919): 147.

<sup>96</sup> For example: Daniel Thomas Cook, *The Commodification of Childhood: The Children’s Clothing Industry and the Rise of the Child Consumer* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Lisa Jacobson, *Raising Consumers: Children and the American Mass Market in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Catherine Van Horn, “Turning Child Readers Into Consumers: Children’s Magazines and Advertising, 1900-1920.” In *Defining Print Culture for Youth: The Cultural Work of Children’s Literature*, edited by Anne Lundin and Wayne A. Wiegand (Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2003).

<sup>97</sup> Karen Sánchez-Eppler, *Dependent States: The Child’s Part in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005): xvii.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, xviii.

<sup>99</sup> Faith E. Smith, “Library Work for Children,” *Public Libraries* 12, no. 3 (March 1907): 83.

<sup>100</sup> Arthur E. Bostwick, “The Socialization of the Library,” *The Bookman* 51, no. 6 (August 1920): 669.

<sup>101</sup> Bostwick, “The Making of an American’s Library,” 401.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 399.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 400.

<sup>104</sup> For discussions of childhood as a time of fear, promise, and potential, see Sánchez-Eppler’s Introduction, and for specific links to the public library and/or reading: “Books and Reading” (1900); Dewey, “Field Libraries”; Van, “What Children Read”; Mabie, “Mr. Mabie Tells of the World’s Greatest University.”

<sup>105</sup> Hubbard, “Fiction and Public Libraries,” 178.

<sup>106</sup> Hubbard, “Are Public Libraries Public Blessings?” 341.

<sup>107</sup> See Good, “The Traveling Library as a Civilizing Force”; Mary Eileen Ahern, “The Educational Force of a Public Library,” *The Chautauquan* 37, no.5 (August 1903): 487-490; F.C.H. Wendel, “The Stranger within Our Gates; What Can the Library Do for Him?” *Public Libraries* 19, no. 3 (March 1911): 89-92.

<sup>108</sup> For examples, see: Ahern, “The Educational Force of a Public Library”; Van, “What Children Read”; “Books and Reading for Young Folk” (July 1900).

<sup>109</sup> Ahern, “The Educational Force of a Public Library,” 488.

<sup>110</sup> Jacobson, *Raising Consumers*, 5.

<sup>111</sup> Bostwick, “The Making of an American’s Library,” 531.

<sup>112</sup> Charles W. Gill, “Reading for Our Boys and Girls,” *The Chautauquan* 70, no. 2 (April 1913): 197-98.

<sup>113</sup> Christopher Morley, *The Child and the Book* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1922). This is the earliest graphic representation of a child reader I have found within professional library literature.



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- <sup>114</sup> Sam Walter Foss, "The Library as an Inspirational Force," *Public Libraries* 4, no. 3 (March 1899): 102-103.
- <sup>115</sup> James R. Kincaid, *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992): 12.
- <sup>116</sup> Sánchez-Eppler, *Dependent States*, xxv.
- <sup>117</sup> Flint, "Women and Reading," 517.
- <sup>118</sup> Sánchez-Eppler, *Dependent States*, xxi.
- <sup>119</sup> Garrison, *Apostles of Culture*, xxvi. Pawley's statement appears in the preface to the 2003 edition of De Garrison's *Apostles of Culture*, a book that was brought back into print largely because, in the twenty four years since its original publication, no other work had significantly challenged its story
- <sup>120</sup> Van Slyck, *Free to All*; Julia L. Mickenberg, *Learning from the Left: Children's Literature, the Cold War, and Radical Politics in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press): 2006.