

1-1-2015

Children's Literature

James Marten

Marquette University, james.marten@marquette.edu

Published version. "Children's Literature" in *A History of American Civil War Literature*. Ed. Coleman Hutchison. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015: 119-133. [Publisher link](#). © 2015 Cambridge University Press. Used with permission.

CHAPTER 8

Children's Literature

James Marten

The Civil War penetrated virtually every aspect of writing for children. Authors adapted prior assumptions and forms to the national emergency and added new values to the canonical strictures to behave morally, obediently, and modestly. “Fighting Against Wrong, and for the Good, the True, and the Beautiful,” the motto of *The Little Corporal*, a children’s magazine published just after the war ended, combined the moral and patriotic urgency reflected in writing for children and youth. Books and magazines helped children analyze the causes and progress of the war and provided a blueprint for their responses to the conflict.¹

Prior to the war, children’s literature focused on self-improvement – temperance, piety, diligence, and pacifism were among the featured values urged on readers – rather than on civic responsibility and on the differences between white and black Americans rather than the injustices of slavery. This was true for religious as well as secular publishers. Although children’s literature produced in the 1860s continued to promote moral behavior and offer stories of hardworking, humble, and obedient children and youth, their content also broadened to include political discussions, serious accounts of battles and campaigns, and examples of children taking part in the war effort. Old values were not so much forgotten as complemented by such war-appropriate virtues as patriotism, a commitment to antislavery, and physical courage. Even though the literature produced during the war seems stilted, hopelessly bound by moral absolutes, and populated by priggish do-gooders, its introduction of secular values and adventurous youngsters helped initiate the “shift away from moral didacticism” described by Anne Scott McLeod.²

The most important content appeared in the fifteen to twenty northern “juvenile” magazines published throughout the 1860s. Some represented religious denominations or were generically – if enthusiastically – Protestant; others, such as *The Student and Schoolmate* and *Our Young Folks*, were secular enterprises. Novels also entered the fray. They featured

exciting tales of danger, escape, and treachery in which characters learned how their individual efforts contributed to the survival of their families, communities, or nation. In the South, wartime shortages of ink, paper, and skilled printers prevented publishers from producing much in the way of literature, but throughout the Confederacy patriotic publishers put out schoolbooks with names such as *The Dixie Primer*, *The Confederate Spelling Book*, and *A New Southern Grammar*. Indeed, nearly three-fourths of the children's books published in the Confederacy were schoolbooks, ranging from Latin grammars to alphabets. Although not all of these publications addressed the war directly, many promoted the Confederate cause, defended slavery, and condemned the North.³ Finally, the war inspired religious and secular writers to publish tracts, textbooks, and even a journal for African Americans to aid their transition from slavery to freedom.

Describing the War

Almost as soon as the fighting began, northern magazines began bringing the war to their readers. *The Student and Schoolmate* periodically published "Letters from the Army" describing soldiers' camp life and a series called "Campaigning" on the organization and deployment of armies. Col. Charles C. Nott wrote information-packed letters to students at a New York City school that were published as *Sketches of the War*.⁴ Leading northern children's magazines such as *The Student and Schoolmate*, *The Little Pilgrim*, *Our Young Folks*, *The Little Corporal*, *Forrester's Playmate*, and *Merry's Museum* offered information, opinions, or war-related trivia in virtually every type of feature: short stories, nature sketches, travel articles, "declamation" pieces, and even games and puzzles.

A few novels revealed the gritty reality of war. The title character of J. T. Trowbridge's *Frank Manly, the Drummer Boy* samples the ubiquitous army temptations of gambling and liquor, while the hero of *Frank on a Gun-Boat* survives an explosion in his gun turret that left the "deck . . . slippery with blood and the turret . . . completely covered with it. The shrieks and groans of the wounded and dying were awful." For a moment, "the young hero was so sick he could scarcely stand."⁵

Most readers would not, of course, ever join the army or see a battle, but authors often thrust their young characters into harm's way. Twelve-year-old (or younger) protagonists fought battles and endured prison camps. Stock characters in these stories included courageous drummer boys who often gave their lives for the Union cause; kindly, grizzled veterans; and oily Confederates. Characters represented the very best in

patriotic, compassionate, and pious northern youth and the worst in mean, impulsive southerners.

Perhaps the best-known writer for children from the 1850s through the 1870s was the prolific Oliver Optic (William T. Adams).⁶ Starting with *The Soldier Boy; or, Tom Somers in the Army* and *The Yankee Middy; or, The Adventures of a Naval Officer*, Optic produced two popular trilogies, the "Army and Navy Stories," which chronicled the fictional adventures of seventeen-year-old twin brothers Tom and Jack Somers. The boys' wartime adventures followed a strict formula. Accompanied by a squad of loyal sidekicks, Jack and Tom demonstrated martial skill and bravery in large unit actions as well as behind-the-lines spy capers. The boys usually experienced a round of captures and escapes, met sympathetic southern Unionists, and made their way back to safety. In addition to common middle-class virtues like loyalty, modesty, and fairness, the Somerses displayed bravery, patriotism, and their superiority to decadent, traitorous southerners. The Somers boys' martial exploits caused the books to transcend typical antebellum storytelling. Although the dialogue is hopelessly moralistic by modern standards, by mid-nineteenth century standards they are dangerously exciting and secular.

Gail Schmunk Murray has argued that Civil War literature for children was highly gendered, with different kind of stories written for boys than for girls. Boys were shown playing at war or actually fighting in real battles; girls were portrayed as home-front heroines or as nurses in training. But a female version of Oliver Optic's youthful heroes was the twelve-year-old title character of Jane Goodwin Austin's *Dora Darling*. Dora's drunken southern father offers a terrible role model; after her Unionist mother dies and her brothers join the Confederate army, the farm is sold and Dora goes to live with a cruel aunt. The story sheds its Dickensian tone when Dora runs away and begins a series of adventures and coincidences that includes meeting up with a kind escaped slave, working as a nurse with the Union army, taming gruff Yankees, saving a kind Yankee captain (from her own brother), and then converting that same brother to the Union cause. *Dora Darling* offers a girl-friendly tale of adventure rarely seen before the Civil War.⁷

Although Edmund Kirke's "The Boy of Chancellorville" put its twelve-year-old hero through a bloody battle and a Confederate prison, juvenile novels were more likely than magazines to put their characters in harm's way. Short stories often featured home-front children responding to the war in predictable ways: forming their own "boy" companies and playing soldier; supporting troops by raising money, packing boxes with

supplies, and sewing; or taking on the responsibilities normally fulfilled by absent fathers or brothers.⁸

Little Women may be the best-known novel on the Civil War home front written for any age group, but the war is less a central component of the plot than it is a backdrop to the various personal challenges and crises faced by the young women in the March family. But many less-known books dealt with the moral challenges of life on the northern home front. *Frank's Campaign*, an early effort by Horatio Alger, features many of the plot devices of the dozens of "rags to riches" books he published after war. Frank wins a school contest with a composition on what boys can do to help win the war; his patriotism becomes much less abstract when his father enlists and Frank needs to assume family responsibilities. Along the way he helps foil an evil war profiteer who is also trying to take away the family farm.⁹

A number of stories managed to encourage readers to join the war effort by supporting the troops as well as refugees, freedmen, and other civilians affected by the war, while at the same time learning common prewar values like humility and generosity. The spoiled children in Lydia Maria Child's "The Two Christmas Evenings" learn the true spirit of the holiday by raising money for a local orphan asylum and for books and toys for contraband children by staging tableaux, giving patriotic speeches, and selling homemade clothes and household items. A girl in another Child story, "The Cloud with the Silver Lining," gives the money she had hoarded to spend at a sanitary fair – giant bazaars held in northern towns and cities to raise money for the U.S. Sanitary Commission – to a poor soldier's orphan. In stories such as these, readers learned that even in war-time certain values were universal.¹⁰

Another way children could prove their loyalty to America and their Christian worth was by assuming the responsibilities left by absent adults. Although not a new plot device, the war offered even more poignant opportunities for children to show maturity and virtue beyond their years. Emily Huntington Miller's "The House that Johnny Rented," serialized in *The Little Corporal*, told the story of the White family, whose father goes off to become a chaplain in the Union army. His invalid wife and several children, including twelve-year-old Johnny, have to fend for themselves. Johnny locates a smaller but cheaper cottage when they are forced out of the parsonage. There the children raise a garden, help their mother, fret about their father, and help teach a contraband boy to read. The children are obedient and cheerful, they patriotically bad-mouth Confederate

generals, and they discover that racial differences are less important than they previously thought.¹¹

Civil War-era children also learned that being a good person was equivalent to being a loyal American. The teenaged title character in Amanda M. Douglas's *Kathie's Soldiers* fulfills her patriotic duty by volunteering at the local sanitary fair and caring for a soldier's daughter. But she also exhibits a moral backbone by refusing to gossip and criticize like the so-called fashionable girls at her school and standing up to the shallow and contemptuous daughter of a dishonest army contractor. Writers made it clear that home-front duties were just as important as battlefront duties. As a young lieutenant declares in another home-front novel, *Battles at Home*, "Our battles must be just where we are put to fight them."¹²

Like the wise lieutenant, many authors cast the war as a metaphor for the everyday struggle between good and evil. That struggle, and the redemption that would inevitably come through devoted and courageous service, were prewar tropes that echoed through the war years.

Explaining the War

With rare exceptions, antebellum books and stories for children had barely noticed the political and moral issues of the day. As McLeod writes, "All juvenile fiction before 1860 was much the same: simple narratives, always pointing to moral, featureless backgrounds, stock characters moving through patterned plots." Slavery "was all but invisible." The exception that proved the rule was Lydia Maria Child's *Juvenile Miscellany*. Fallout from its markedly antislavery point of view helped lead to its eventual failure after a ten-year run. But the outbreak of the war rapidly politicized writing for youngsters, which sought to inspire patriotism by defining northern war aims, blaming slavery for causing the war, and recognizing the humanity of former slaves. A character in J. T. Trowbridge's "The Turning of the Leaf" summarized the North's political outlook: "Slavery was the cause of the war; and God permitted the war in order that slavery might be destroyed." The benefits of the American political system, argued *Merry's Museum*, made "rebellion in such a country as this . . . the highest of crimes." Other writers for children, like their counterparts who wrote for adults, stressed the arrogance and laziness of slave owners and promoted the idea of the alleged "slave power conspiracy" that had led the South to war.¹³

Although northern authors were comfortable attacking the institution of slavery and slave owners themselves, they struggled with their presentation

of African Americans, most of whom – adults as well as children – appeared as mere objects of pity or charity. In Christie Pearl’s “The Contraband,” a half-dozen well-off children were taught a lesson familiar to prewar readers but with a wartime twist when they tried to pass off unwanted clothes by giving them to a clothing drive for freedchildren in the South. Their father mildly scolds them and convinces them to display true charity by donating some of their favorite clothes and toys instead. Freed and enslaved African Americans were frequently incorporated into political lessons in this way but rarely presented as political, economic, or intellectual equals to whites. For every intelligent, heroic, character like the self-assured Pompey in Trowbridge’s *The Three Scouts*, there were many others burdened with antebellum stereotypes or limited to submissive supporting roles. Reflecting the North’s limited racial vision, most writers could, at best, imagine African Americans as rather helpless, pitiable beings.¹⁴

An example of white characters actually interacting with African Americans on a personal level was so rare as to prove the point. A story appearing in *Forrester’s Playmate* in early 1864 related an incident between the narrator and a free boy named Jim Dick. During an afternoon of play with other neighborhood boys, the whites drive Jim away by calling him “‘negro,’ ‘blackamoor,’ and other ill names.” The little black boy, his feelings hurt, goes home. Later, Jim asks the narrator not to call him those names again. “These words went to my heart,” recalled the narrator, who told the tale as a true story, “I burst into tears, and from that time I resolved I would never again be guilty of abusing a poor black.”¹⁵

It cannot really be said that the war inspired a “literature” for Southern children, although the few surviving examples display themes very similar to those in northern magazines. Most Confederate-era periodicals for children were published by religious denominations. The Baptists published *Child’s Index*, the Presbyterians the *Children’s Friend*, and the Methodists the *Children’s Guide*. The short-lived *Child’s Banner* was a nondenominational religious publication out of Salisbury, North Carolina. Despite their theological orientation, these publications explained the war to children and encouraged their involvement in the southern cause. The war finally gave southern publishers a chance to put into action a minor facet of antebellum southern nationalism: creating “southern books for southern children.”¹⁶

Writers for southern children matched their northern counterparts in their emphases on living Godly and patriotic lives. Stories in the *Child’s Index*, for example, described the religious spirit in the rebel army, compared the Confederacy’s war for independence to the American

Revolution, and explained how the Bible justified slavery. In one story a little girl converts her soldier-father on his sickbed, while in another a boy, despite his desperate desire to demonstrate his bravery and patriotism by joining the army, stays home to help his mother after his father's death in battle. The *Deaf Mute Casket*, published by the North Carolina Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind, even offered the story of a valiant drummer and advised girls to prepare to educate the next generation of southerners by studying hard.

Only a handful of book-length, noneducational imprints appeared in the Confederate states, and they were limited to alphabets and collections of stories and poems. *For the Little Ones*, "Dedicated to the Little Girls and Boys of the Southern Confederacy," included a mother's description of her two-year-old playing soldier, and "Willie's Political Alphabet," which offered such rhymes as "A is for the Army-now don't you forget/ And B's for the Banner, the 'flag of the free." The pocket-sized *Boys and Girls Stories of the War* contained tales of a refugee woman and her two children, a loyal slave, a rebel prisoner in New Orleans, and the horrific fighting at the 1863 Battle of Chancellorsville.¹⁷

The most important writing for Confederate children – in terms of quantity as well as depth of engagement with the war – appeared in the scores of primers, readers, and arithmetics produced by southern presses. Antebellum southerners had often complained about the dependence of southern schools on textbooks published in the North, which many believed promoted an antisouthern, antislavery bias. After secession, publishers in cities all over the Confederacy acted on this belief, producing nearly 100 schoolbooks.¹⁸

Patriotic authors promoted section-specific interests in ways similar to John H. Rice's long description in *System of Modern Geography* in which he promised that the "Political and Physical Condition of the States composing the Confederate States of America are fully treated of, and their progress in Commerce, Education, Agriculture, Internal Improvements and Mechanic Arts, prominently set forth." His volume, "compiled by a Southern man, published upon our own soil," would correct "every yankee work" that had "studiously concealed" the "actual conditions and resources" of the South.¹⁹

Obviously, Confederate authors did not reject their traditional responsibilities to inculcate morality and offer narratives of good behavior; they merely added Confederate values to the ones readily accepted by most Americans. Some limited their promotion of Confederate values to their titles – the word "Dixie" appeared in several, for instance – or to

brief mentions of Confederate or southern institutions, values, or leaders. Some histories and readers simply listed the names of Confederate states, politicians, or generals. Arithmetics nodded toward the war raging around them by blending generic story problems with those tinged with Confederate superiority, like the famous problem cited by countless historians of the era: "If one Confederate soldier can whip 7 yankees, how many soldiers can whip 49 yankees?"²⁰

But several schoolbooks went deeper, showing how the North had caused the war, justifying slavery, and glorifying Confederate heroes. Two geography texts offered the most thorough analysis of the differences between Yankees and Confederates. Rice insisted that enslavement and Christianization had rescued Africans from the "degraded and savage condition" in which they had lived in Africa. He promoted the stereotype of Yankees as a "keen, thrifty . . . money-loving and money-making" people whose "infidelity and a reckless puritanical fanaticism" were "fast robbing the people of all enobling traits of character." The Constitution had been "overthrown," and in the North "despotism reigns supreme in the hands of a political anti-slavery party." He contrasted affairs in the United States to the Confederacy, where slavery "is the corner stone of her governmental fabric" and where "an indomitable spirit of self-reliance" regulates men's behavior and "a career of greatness" has "just commenced." Mrs. M. B. Moore also criticized the northerners who controlled the U. S. government in her *Geographical Reader*. "Once the most prosperous country in the world," the United States had been ripped apart after northerners found slavery unprofitable in their region, when they began "to preach, to lecture, and to write about the sin of slavery." Since Lincoln had "declared war" on the Confederate States, the "earth has been drenched with blood."²¹

It is worth noting that northern schoolbooks published between 1861 and 1865 barely mentioned the war. A few grammars included military and political terms in their exercises, some arithmetic texts incorporated the war into scattered story problems, and several readers featured stories, documents, or excerpts from patriotic speeches, songs, and poems. Of course, northern publishers and educators were building neither a country nor a publishing industry from scratch, so there was less of a need to rush patriotic sentiments into print. Students made due with older editions (which southern authors borrowed from quite liberally) that already contained founding documents and stirring speeches from the past.

It is, of course, almost impossible to gauge just how many children even read these books and magazines, let alone how many actually

absorbed the lessons contained in the literature intended for them. This is especially true for the Confederate states. But if the Boston boy Gerald Norcross, who turned seven in 1861, is any indication, affluent northeasterners were enthusiastic consumers of wartime literature. Gerald filled his diary with descriptions of war play and lists of reading matter he devoured and shared with friends during the last two years of the war. They ranged from dime novels like *War Trails*, *Vicksburg Spy*, and *Old Hal Williams; or the Spy of Atlanta* to factual narratives such as *Life and Campaigns of Gen. McClellan*, *Days and Nights on the Battlefield*, and *Following the Flag* to Oliver Optic's dual trilogies. He was also a subscriber to *Our Young Folks*.²²

A slightly more direct kind of evidence of the influence of wartime literature, at least among middle-class, urban northerners, appears in the handful of "amateur newspapers" that survive from the 1860s. Some were professionally printed and distributed throughout neighborhoods or towns, whereas others were handwritten and limited to immediate families. The juvenile editors mimicked the great political and social debates of the day, featuring in their little publications almost every genre: adventure stories, fire-breathing editorials, correspondence, serials, poetry, and jokes.

One example was the *Athenaeum*, which was published by the boys of Newark High School in New Jersey, as a handwritten monthly. The stories, poems, and essays, originally composed as class assignments, covered topics ranging from the sack of Lawrence, Kansas, to the humorous story "Uncle Zeke at the Fair," where an old "down easter" battled crowds and high prices at the local sanitary fair. Some were accompanied by detailed line drawings. One editorial called on readers to forgive soldiers who succumbed to camp temptations and to overlook their shortcomings. "It becomes us not to censure the soldier who has enlisted under the banner we love," declared the teenaged editorialist, "to keep it sacred from vile traitorous hands, or give his life as an alternative!" Another piece borrowed the style of human interest travelogues that were regular features in juvenile magazines by tracing the "career" of a leather boot, from the slaughterhouse and tannery through bloody battles, Libby Prison, and its final resting place as a war "memento" in its owner's closet after returning safely home.²³

Writing for African Americans

Not surprisingly, publishers produced relatively little reading material specifically for African Americans; after all, they comprised less than 2 percent of the northern population in 1860 and most southern blacks were slaves.²⁴

Nevertheless, a third genre of Civil War literature for children appeared late in the war: newspapers and books for the tens of thousands of freed-people crowding into schools throughout the South. In addition to educational materials – including large boards printed with numbers, letters, or Bible verses for use in missionary schools that educated scores of children and adults in a single room – the American Tract Society published an “Educational Series” in 1864 and 1865. *The Freedman’s Spelling Book*, *The Freedman’s Primer*, *The Freedman’s Second Reader*, and *The Freedman’s Third Reader* resembled typical antebellum schoolbooks. They also contained material that would never have appeared in a northern school before the war, including excerpts from the speeches of Abraham Lincoln as well as documents and biographical segments on black heroes and heroines such as Paul Cuffe, Toussaint L’Ouverture, Frederick Douglass, and Phillis Wheatley and poems and stories describing the bravery and patriotism of black Union soldiers.

Although not intended specifically for children, evidence suggests that *The Freedman*, another American Tract Society publication, was read by black boys and girls. Published every month between January 1864 and early 1869, more than half a million copies of *The Freedman* were distributed in 1865–1866 alone. The four-page monthly resembled any other juvenile magazine or Sunday School paper, with writing exercises, simple reading and arithmetic lessons, poems, prayers, and general information about geography, nature, and history. Most issues ignored race entirely. The Ten Commandments appeared in every issue, and articles, stories, and exercises emphasized the importance of such traditional values as thrift, hard work, temperance, honesty, and perseverance. Readers were never, however, allowed to forget the responsibilities that freedom had laid on the former slaves. “But what is it to be free?” one writing example intoned. “I am free to be a good and noble man, and not an idle, bad, worthless fellow.”²⁵

Nonetheless, *The Freedman* did offer readers glimpses of their African heritage and current contributions to the Union war effort. Many articles boasted of the large number of black men joining the Union army, admired their soldierly behavior, and described their battlefield exploits. Mirroring Confederate arithmetics, students were asked: “If the freedmen should kill, or take prisoners, 394 of the rebels who numbered 462, how many would be left to run away after the battle?”²⁶

Lydia Maria Child, continuing her prewar efforts to offer child-friendly discussions of race, also published *The Freedman’s Book*, which focused primarily on biographical sketches and excerpts by African Americans such as Phillis Wheatley and Harriet Jacobs. Child encouraged her

readers to imagine beyond the constricts placed on them by many white authors; the role models she held up before them included the astronomer Benjamin Banneker, the revolutionary Toussaint L'Ouverture, and the editor, reformer, and statesman Frederick Douglass. Child emphasized their independence and achievements over their acquisition of white middle-class values.²⁷

Despite these positive articles, most wartime publications for African Americans stressed responsibility and dependence and accepted contemporary notions about racial hierarchy. By de-emphasizing liberty and highlighting obedience and piety, *The Freedman* and other publications for African Americans undercut any encouragement for growth and equality and helped build the obstacles to true freedom that freedpeople would face following the war.

Aftermaths

Although the Reconstruction process continued until the late 1870s in some parts of the South, the Civil War faded quickly from writings for children, and Reconstruction was barely mentioned. Courtney Weikle-Mills suggests that the war caused writers for children to place more emphasis on citizenship in general and on the responsibilities of children as citizens in particular, but the war as an "event" virtually disappeared from children's magazines and books. Union and Confederate veterans alike tried to influence the interpretation of the causes and outcome of the war in schoolbooks published during the last two or three decades of the century, but with only mixed success.²⁸

There were a few exceptions. Three years after the war ended, a dark novel called *The Princess of the Moon*, published by a "Lady of Warrenton, Virginia" and subtitled *A Confederate Fairy Story*, was dedicated to "the children of the South, who suffered during the late War." A Confederate returns to find his home destroyed and parents dead. Mounting a flying horse provided by a mysterious fairy, he tours a ravaged South and a prosperous North, where he sees Yankee homes filled with belongings plundered from southern houses. The discouraged veteran flees to the moon, where lives a tolerant kingdom of fairies. He finds refuge after telling them of his and his country's plight. He eventually marries a princess and becomes the heir apparent to the throne. Suddenly, huge balloons appear and greedy Yankees clutching carpetbags – northern "carpetbaggers" were legendary villains in southern versions of Reconstruction – swarm onto the moon. Fairies chase them away, but Randolph can never go home; in this

allegorical novel, Reconstruction never ends and Redemption – the retaking of southern states by southern Democrats – never occurs.²⁹

Virtually no original war-related novels for juveniles appeared after the summer of 1865, although reprints of a number of popular dime novels came out in the mid-1870s, and editions of Oliver Optic's pair of trilogies occasionally appeared throughout the rest of the century. For several years after the end of the war, children's magazines promoted sectional reconciliation with stories and travelogues showing that southerners generally supported the Union during the war and fought for the Confederacy or paid Confederate taxes only because they could not resist the manipulations of the slavocrat minority.

A *Student and Schoolmate* "dialogue" featured characters named "Palmetto," "Buckeye," and other nom de plumes associated with particular states or sections. After they bicker over sectional interests for a time, their "Uncle Sam" eventually convinces them to reconcile, and they declare, "We have come forth from our trial purified and strong, have agreed to let bygones be bygones, and now we are ready to take the lead in the world's grand march to the highest civilization." Poems and stories published in the months following Appomattox also supported returning veterans, while *The Little Corporal* urged its readers to redirect their war work by aiding soldiers' orphans.³⁰

Beginning in January 1867 Optic continued to explore war issues and subjects in *Oliver Optic's Magazine*, which featured several battle stories and a number of biographies of important Union generals, with at least seven separate articles on General Ulysses S. Grant. Even Optic, however, decided the well of war stories had run dry by 1870.

One of the few postwar, southern-produced children's magazines barely noticed either the war or Reconstruction. The editors of the *Southern Boys and Girls' Monthly* complained that "too much have we been disposed to rely on other sections of the land and other countries of the world to supply us with literature for the old and the young." Although a handful of poems, stories, and puzzles touched on war themes, most of the pieces published during the magazine's nearly two-year run consisted of highly moralistic stories about nature, travel, and history, as well as cheerful poems about death.³¹

Conclusion

In an essay published early in 1866, the abolitionist, former Union army officer, and writer Thomas Wentworth Higginson briefly reviewed

the children's books inspired by the war. He liked the campaign narratives, which he found "more interesting than fiction" but dismissed Oliver Optic's books as "spirited and correct enough" but hastily written and filled with caricatures. He also criticized novelists who burdened African American characters with racist dialects and behavior. In general, Higginson found little to recommend Civil War writing for children and youth.³²

Higginson's disdain notwithstanding, untold thousands of boys and girls read the periodical literature, novels, and schoolbooks inspired by the Civil War. Although it is probably true, as John Morton Blum suggested, that Civil War-era literature for children was "the incidental work of leading British and American authors, and the major work of some incidental writers of Victorian prose and poetry," that literature nonetheless provided a framework for living through those violent times. From these stories and editorials, games and illustrations, and adventures and parables, readers could piece together the conflict's causes and effects and discern how their own lives and futures fit into it. At the same time, readers were reminded of the age-old values that had been promoted in children's antebellum literature and would continue to appear in writing for children for many decades after the war. Joining them, however, were new values like bravery and patriotism – an aggressive, martial patriotism that would appear from time to time, whenever the United States faced external threats or flexed its growing power on the national stage.³³

Notes

- 1 *The Little Corporal* (Chicago: Alfred Sewell, 1865–1875).
- 2 Anne Scott MacLeod, *American Childhood: Essays on Children's Literature of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), p. 75.
- 3 Sarah Law Kennerly, "Confederate Juvenile Imprints: Children's Books and Periodicals Published in the Confederate States of American, 1861–1865", PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1956, pp. 1–2, 55–180.
- 4 Col. Charles C. Nott, *Sketches of the War: A Series of Letters to the North Moore Street School of New York*, 4th ed. (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph, 1865).
- 5 Charles Fosdick, *Frank on a Gun-boat* (Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, 1864), p. 129.
- 6 Oliver Optic, *The Soldier Boy; or, Tom Somers in the Army: Story of the Great Rebellion* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1863).
- 7 Gail Schmunk Murray, *American Children's Literature and the Construction of Childhood* (New York: Twayne, 1998); Jane Goodwin Austin, *Dora Darling: The Daughter of the Regiment* (Boston: Tilton, 1865).

- 8 Edmund Kirke, "The Boy of Chancellorville," *Our Young Folks* 1 (Sept. 1865), 600–608.
- 9 Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women* (Boston: Roberts Bros., 1868–1869); Horatio Alger, Jr., *Frank's Campaign; or, What Boys Can Do on the Farm for the Camp* (Boston: Loring, 1864).
- 10 Lydia Maria Child, "The Two Christmas Evenings," *Our Young Folks* 2 (Jan. 1866), 2–13.
- 11 Emily Huntington Miller, "The House that Johnny Rented," *Little Corporal* 1 (July 1865), 7–9; (Aug. 1865), 19–21; (Sept. 1865), 42–45.
- 12 Amanda M. Douglas, *Kathie's Soldiers* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1870); Mary G. Darling, *Battles at Home* (Boston: Horace B. Fuller, 1870), pp. 246–247.
- 13 MacLeod, *American Childhood*, p. 92; J. T. Trowbridge, "Turning of the Leaf," *Our Young Folks* 1 (June 1865), 399; *Merry's Museum* quoted in Patricia Ann Pflieger, "A Visit to Merry's Museum; or, Social Values in a Nineteenth-Century American Periodical for Children," PhD Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1987, p. 190.
- 14 Christie Pearl, "The Contraband," *Student and Schoolmate* (Feb. 1862), 45–49; J. T. Trowbridge, *The Three Scouts* (Boston: Tilton, 1865).
- 15 "Jim Dick; or, the Best Revenge," *Forrester's Playmate* (May 1864), 45–46.
- 16 Murray, *American Children's Literature*, p. 143.
- 17 *For the Little Ones* (Savannah: John M. Cooper, n.d.), 32–33.
- 18 T. Michael Parrish and Robert W. Willingham, Jr., *Confederate Imprints: A Bibliography of Southern Publications from Secession to Surrender* (Austin: Jenkins, 1984), pp. 630–654.
- 19 John H. Rice, *System of Modern Geography, Compiled from various Sources and Adapted to the Present Condition of the World; Expressly for the use of Schools and Academies in the Confederate States of America* (Atlanta, GA: Franklin, 1862), p. 3.
- 20 L. Johnson, *An Elementary Arithmetic, Designed for Beginners* (Raleigh: Branson and Farrar, 1864), pp. 121–122.
- 21 Rice, *System of Modern Geography*, pp. 21, 51, 85; M. B. Moore, *The Geographical Reader, for the Dixie Children* (Raleigh, NC: Branson, Farrar & Co., 1863), pp. 23, 33.
- 22 Gerald Norcross, Diaries (May 28, 1863; November 11 and December 24, 1864; February 24 and March 12, 1865), American Antiquarian Society (Worcester, MA).
- 23 *Athenaeum*, Newark High School, New Jersey Historical Society (Newark, New Jersey, October 1863; April, May, June, 1864).
- 24 Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, *Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals By Race, 1790 to 1990, and By Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For The United States, Regions, Divisions, and States*, Working Paper Series No. 56. (Washington, DC: Population Division, U. S. Census Bureau, 2002). <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0056/twps0056.html> (accessed 2 February 2014).
- 25 *The Freedman* (Boston: American Tract Society, 1864–1869), p. 15.

- 26 *The Freedman* (March 1865), p. 12.
- 27 Lydia Maria Child, *The Freedman's Book* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1865).
- 28 Courtney Weikle-Mills, *Imaginary Citizens: Child Readers and the Limits of American Independence, 1640–1868* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).
- 29 Lady of Warrenton, Virginia, *The Princess of the Moon: A Confederate Fairy Story* (Warrenton, VA: n.p., 1869).
- 30 "Uncle Sam's Boys after the War," *Student and Schoolmate* (Dec. 1865), 152.
- 31 "Salutary," *Southern Boys and Girls' Monthly* (Jan. 1867), 1–2.
- 32 Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Children's Books of the Year," *North American Review* 102 (Jan. 1866), 241–243.
- 33 John Morton Blum (ed.), *Yesterday's Children: An Anthology Compiled from the Pages of Our Young Folks, 1865–1873* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959), p. xiii.