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"MILK FOR BABES AND MEAT FOR MEN":
THE CHILDREN'S BOOKS OF THE AMERICAN SUNDAY-SCHOOL UNION, 1825-1865

by

Jennifer A. Perry

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Early American Culture
Spring 1995

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1825-1865

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ABSTRACT

The American Sunday-School Union, an interdenominational Protestant organization based in Philadelphia, began publishing children's books soon after its incorporation in 1824. Its professed aim in disseminating works to a juvenile audience was to promote the Christian values which its leaders viewed as lacking or completely absent in both the children's literature of the era and in American society in general. The American Sunday-School Union chose to target children in the hope that if instructed in the "knowledge of the Lord" at an early age, the rising generations of American children would consequently grow up to be moral, Christian adults. Therefore, the Union's Publications Committee vowed in 1824 to publish only those books which dealt specifically with religion.

This study examines the changing goals and products of the American Sunday-School Union's publishing campaign over a forty-year period from 1825 until near the end of the first Editor's tenure in 1865. Sources analyzed include a variety of American Sunday-School Union...
documents ranging from published sermons, annual reports, book catalogues, and the books themselves to unpublished sources including minutes and reports of the Publications Committee and correspondence from the Union’s missionaries.

This body of evidence reveals that subtle disparities existed between the goals the American Sunday-School Union expressed publicly concerning its publications and the policies the Publications Committee administered privately. Subject matter was not limited to religion; the target audience was not limited to children; and illustrations, which originally had been deemed inappropriate for children’s literature, became common. As the century progressed, American Sunday-School Union publications became virtually indistinguishable from the very publications they had originally been intended to replace. However, although Union publications looked drastically different in 1865 compared with how they appeared in 1825, the underlying principles on which they were based remained the same. Rather than being a sign of the sacrifice or abandonment of the Union’s initial goals, these changes, by ensuring that Union books were bought and read, actually served to secure the American Sunday-School Union’s place of influence in nineteenth-century American society.
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

"Tell me what you are learning and I will tell you what you are."1

On May 13, 1817 a group of Philadelphia businessmen acting as representatives of several local denominational Sunday schools met at the northwest corner of Fourth and Vine Streets where they resolved to establish an interdenominational society "to cultivate unity and Christian charity."2 Adhering to methods established by their English predecessors, the founders of this organization, which became known as the Sunday and Adult School Union, aimed their message of piety at children and thus quickly began to disseminate it through literature which they claimed was produced specifically for a juvenile audience.


The Union's first publication was issued within months of its founding and by its fifth year it could boast distribution of "about 90,000 books, besides 25,000 hymn books, 8,000 school books, 173,000 tracts, and 500,000 blue and red Scripture tickets." When the Sunday and Adult School Union was reorganized as the American Sunday-School Union in 1824, the phrasing of its constitution implied that the mission of establishing new Sunday schools was subordinate to the goal of spreading publications for children "in which experimental religion is attractively exhibited in the forms of colloquy and narrative":

Its [the American Sunday-School Union's] objects are to...circulate moral and religious publications in every part of the land; to make the liberty of the press conducive to the 'liberty of the gospel'...and to endeavor to plant a sunday [sic] school wherever there is a population.

Soon the books of the American Sunday-School Union became the institution's most widely traveled

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3The first publication, according to Rice in Sunday-School Movement and subsequent scholars, was a reprint of the English title Little Henry and His Bearer by Mrs. Sherwood; it was first published in England in 1814. Rice, Sunday-School Movement, p. 66.

missionaries. The Union attributed the 6,121 professions of faith made by child-scholars in 1830 alone to the circulation of "over 6,000,000 copies of Sunday-school works, 200 bound volumes for libraries...a 'Teacher's Magazine,' and two other periodicals." By 1831 the Union's annual report stated, "The society has no interests of greater magnitude than those connected with the publication of books." The survival of these children's books in various depositories, as well as the existence of volumes of American Sunday-School Union documents pertaining to this organization's ideology in general, and, more specifically, to its publishing campaign, provide a student of material culture with the rare opportunity of exploring two areas of inquiry long overlooked in material culture scholarship--cultural change as illustrated through artifacts produced for children and books as objects worthy of artifact-based study.

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5Rice, Sunday-School Movement, p. 146.


7Collections including American Sunday-School Union books examined for this study are at the Free Library of Philadelphia; the Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia (included in ASSU Papers); and the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum Library, Winterthur, Delaware (included in the Maxine Waldron Collection of Children's Books and Paper Toys). All American Sunday-School Union documents consulted are part of the American Sunday-School Union Papers at the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia.
Cultural historians and social scientists frequently employ the subjects of children and childhood to study society as a whole. In doing so they subscribe, whether consciously or unconsciously, to a method and belief Hector St. John Crevécour expressed over two-hundred years ago:

The easiest way of becoming acquainted with the mode of thinking, the rules of conduct, and the prevailing manners of any people is to examine what sort of education they give their children, how they treat them at home, and what they are taught in their places of public worship.

Efforts to adopt the same approach within material culture exist but are few and far between. Those who have pursued it, however, have determined that artifacts pertaining to children are as capable of being used as reflections of a

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given people, place, and time as is any other group of objects. Similarly, although other disciplines have paid much attention to the many aspects and implications of books, virtually no scholarship devoted to them, children's or otherwise, exists in material culture literature. Due to their primary reliance on the written word, those few material culturists who have devoted good research to the topic include Karin Lee Fishbeck Calvert, "To Be A Child," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Delaware, 1984); Rebecca Jordan Hammell, "To Educate and Amuse: Paper Dolls and Toys, 1640-1900," (M.A. thesis, University of Delaware, 1988); Bernard Mergen, "Toys and American Culture: Objects as Hypotheses," Journal of American Culture 3:4 (Winter 1980): 605-19; The Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum, A Century of Childhood 1820-1920 (Rochester: The Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum, 1984); and Colin White, The World of the Nursery (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1984).

In an essay on material culture theory and method, Jules David Prown outlines the range of objects he feels falls under the heading of "material culture." Prown places books under his sub-category heading of "Diversions." Later, however, in reviewing the "evidential promise" of the six sub-categories he has previously defined, Prown evades any real discussion of "Diversions" (which also includes toys and games) by reasoning that the category is at present still too ill-defined to warrant an exploration of potential scholarship. (Jules David Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," in ed. Robert Blair St. George, Material Life in America 1600-1860 [Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988], pp. 17-37.) Similarly, in a twenty-five page article on the research possibilities surrounding the material culture of childhood, Thomas J. Schlereth devotes only a thirteen-line paragraph to children's literature, as occurring in book or other forms. (Thomas J. Schlereth, "The Material Culture of Childhood," in Schlereth, Cultural History, pp. 87-111.) In contrast, for an excellent study of the book as artifact, see The Strong Museum, At Home With A Book: Reading in America, 1840-1940 (Rochester: The Strong Museum, 1986). Other studies which deal with books in one way or another include, among many others, William J. Gilmore, Reading Becomes a Necessity of Life: Material and Cultural Life in Rural New England, 1780-1835 (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1989); Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, The Book in America: A History of the Making and Selling of Books in the United States (New York: R.R. Bowker, 1952); John Tebbel, Between Covers: The
studies of books and other forms of written evidence are too often relegated to a domain of secondary importance by those material culturists who proclaim artifacts to be "inherently more powerful than words." Such students dismiss the messages also inherent in words and, even more significant, they deny the very physicality of books (books are usually bound, made of paper, and often include color and illustrations), and ignore the fact that, in contrast to the typical material culture study which remains essentially either a visual (paintings, architecture) or a literal (probate records, inventories) exercise, books demand both types of evaluation.

In an attempt to add a new group of objects to the repertoire of material culture subjects, this study

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focuses on the children's literature of the American Sunday-School Union. It is time for material culturists to join the ranks of their academic colleagues (including social and intellectual historians, literary scholars, folklorists, and even linguists) who frequently use children's literature as a data base. A material culture approach must, however, expand upon existing interpretations of children's literature, much of which uses only the text as an indicator of a society's mindset and/or way of life. (Childrearing practices, religious beliefs, methods of education, dominant ideologies, and psychological make-up are just some of the issues academics have explored via children's literature.14) It is essential to

fuse textual and physical content in an interpretation of American Sunday-School Union children’s books so that both Crevecour’s idea-oriented approach and material culture’s largely object-oriented approach are employed.¹⁵

Due to the sheer amount of surviving material (the Free Library alone houses more than 20,000 American Sunday-School Union books), the present study is limited to those publications produced during the tenure of the Union’s first and by all accounts most influential editor, Frederick A. Packard. Packard remained at the helm of the Publication Committee from 1829 until 1867. By examining the Union’s annual reports, anniversary sermons, Publication Committee minutes and reports, correspondence, administrative records, and, of course, books themselves from these years, the American Sunday-School Union’s role in mid-nineteenth-century America is revealed and assessed.

In accordance with the view held by most material culturists that their discipline’s greatest contribution

¹⁵I agree with Wilcomb E. Washburn, "Manuscripts and Manufacts," in Schlereth, Material Culture Studies, pp. 101-05, who believes that the current dichotomy often set up between "idea-oriented" and "object-oriented" material culturists is unjustifiable and potentially detrimental to successful work in the field.
to history is its ability to reveal cultural attitudes and social realities of the past, this study of children's books is considered "in a context of ideas, values, and other social circumstances of their time." Therefore, it is hoped this examination of the children's literature published, supported, and absorbed by more than a generation of Americans, when placed in an historical and cultural context, will also serve to elucidate some general characteristics of American society 1829-1867. This aim of interpreting objects as reflections of certain aspects of their producing culture is the first and foremost purpose of this material culture study since, ultimately, "[I]t is the culture, rather than the material, that should interest the material culture researchers...the spatial and analytical understanding offered by artifacts, not the things themselves...is the...goal."

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Chapter 2

"A NATIONAL INSTITUTION":
THE AMERICAN SUNDAY-SCHOOL UNION AS A MANIFESTATION
OF THE SUNDAY SCHOOL MOVEMENT

In April of 1845 Frederick A. Packard, Editor of
Publications of the American Sunday-School Union1, wrote
to a colleague in New York requesting an opinion on a
manuscript the American Sunday-School Union Publication
Committee was seriously considering publishing. Perhaps
so that the New York reviewer would have some guidelines
on which to base his evaluation, Packard used most of the
letter space to explain what he thought should be
essential characteristics of any American Sunday-School

1Different authors cite the name of this organization in
different ways, including American Sunday School Union, American
Sunday school Union, and American Sunday-school Union. Since a
uniform term has yet to be implemented, this paper, based on
references in the Union's charter and on citations in annual
reports and minutes of various committees from the years under
investigation, refers to the institution in the way it most often
referred to itself—the American Sunday-School Union. (For ease in
reading, it will be abbreviated in footnotes as ASSU.) In 1974,
the American Sunday-School Union stopped publishing books in order
to devote its energies entirely to missionary endeavors. It
survives today in Villanova, Pennsylvania as the American
Missionary Fellowship. (Jim Gerhart, interview by author,
Villanova, Pennsylvania, 31 January 1991)
Union publication, and to comment on what he felt was the foremost mission of the Publications Committee:

whatever is published on the most important of all subjects—the relations of men to God—should be Scriptural, reasonable, and well-digested...as Christian freemen having equal access to the fountain of all truth, we [the Publications Committee] claim the right and ability to judge whatever sentiments conform to the revealed will of God, and to propagate them...all over the land, and especially among youth.²

In articulating his vision of the influence he hoped American Sunday-School Union publications would wield, Packard, not unknowingly, defined the goals of an entity actually much larger than his Publications Committee. In fact, what he described were the aims and expectations of the entire American Sunday-School Union organization—an organization which, long before Packard had solicited the help of the New York critic, had extended its boundaries far beyond Packard’s office walls at 146 Chestnut Street in Philadelphia. (Figure 1)

As early as 1826 the newspaper American Sentinel referred to the American Sunday-School Union as "one grand system...spread from Maine to Mexico, and from the

Figure 1: The American Sunday-School Union building on Chestnut Street, Philadelphia; circa 1850. (American Sunday-School Union Papers [ASSU Papers], Presbyterian Historical Society [PHS])
Atlantic to the Western Wilderness." This "grand system," the headquarters of which were located in a simple three story building in Philadelphia, was comprised of two separate components—a missionary department and a publishing department. Although the day-to-day business affairs of each division were handled independently of each other, both were working, albeit through different means, toward the same goal—fulfillment of the essence of the American Sunday-School Union motto which had been adopted at the Union's inception in 1824: "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord." (Figure 2)

Through their separate quests to transform the Union's motto from the abstract to the concrete, each department indirectly supported and sustained the other. Missionaries on horseback traveled throughout the country where they established Sunday schools and converted populations, thereby providing an ever growing audience and market for the Union's published works; simultaneously, the Union's city-based publishers supplied

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4 Quoted in Foster, Errand of Mercy, p. 119.
**Figure 2**: Motto of the American Sunday-School Union: "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord." (ASSU Papers, PHS)
missionaries with what were often the only tangible tools of conversion—books—the presence of which enabled missionaries to leave the message of their teachings behind them when they moved on to other communities.

In acknowledging the most fundamental of American Sunday-School Union principles in his expressed wishes for the content and aim of Union publications, Packard revealed this intricate link between what appeared on paper as the Union's two seemingly separate and very distinct departments. The American Sunday-School Union existed simultaneously as a consciously defined and cultivated religious institution and as an equally consciously cultivated, but not as consciously defined, secular institution. The supremely religious-minded missionary division favored verbal transmission of ideas via active missionaries and, appropriately, was administered by volunteer theological students as well as by workers of other established mission work organizations.5 The self-proclaimed equally religious but more practical-minded publications division, however,

5In the beginning, the missionary department of the American Sunday-School Union relied on the services of workers from, among other organizations, the American Home Missionary Society, the Presbyterian Board of Missions, and the Baptist Home Missionary Society. By the late 1820s, though, the Union employed thirty full-time missionaries of its own. See Anne M. Boylan, Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution 1790-1880 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 69.
placed its faith in the success of the Union's moral campaign in the power of the written word and was headed by an editor hired as much for his business acumen as he was for his religious convictions.\footnote{Although serving as a superintendent of a Massachusetts Congregationalist Church Sunday school when he was approached by the American Sunday-School Union to serve as its first editor-in-chief of publications, Frederick Adolphus Packard brought mainly a law and journalism background to the position when he assumed his responsibilities in 1828. After graduating from Harvard in 1814, Packard had practiced law in Northampton and Springfield, Massachusetts and had served as the editor of the Hampshire Federalist, the predecessor of the Springfield Republican. Upon his death in 1867 at the age of seventy-three, Packard was remembered by one of the Union's Managers as much for his "clear and sound judgment,...vigorous and cultivated intellect,...and a conscientious devotion to his work" as he was for his "heart alive to the great interests of humanity." See Reverend Galbraith Hall Todd, The Torch and the Flag (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union [ASSU], 1966) and Edwin Wilbur Rice, The Sunday-School Movement and the American Sunday-School Union 1780-1917 (Philadelphia: ASSU, 1917), p. 177.}

Despite utilizing different channels of communication and employing different types of leaders, both segments of the organization were united in their aim to spread evangelical truth through the word of God. Rather than reflecting an editorial policy based on tenets supported and enforced only by members of the Publications Committee, Packard's comments echoed an adherence to aspirations and intentions presumed by all Union members to be held in common by all other members of the institution, no matter how variant their individual roles.
In proclaiming the clearly defined (at least on paper) objective of imparting religious knowledge to the masses, the American Sunday-School Union defined itself as a participant in the early nineteenth-century nationwide reform movement known simply as the Sunday school movement. The Union’s publications, as well as its role in society, are fully understood only when examined in that context.

The establishment of the American Sunday-School Union in 1824 represented the culmination of an evangelical Sunday school movement in America which had alternately flourished and floundered since the years immediately following the end of the Revolutionary War. Before 1824 the American Sunday school movement manifested itself primarily in the form of largely independent and localized Protestant schools and organizations. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, however, officers of the Philadelphia based Sunday and Adult School Union recognized that unity of Sunday school associations was necessary not only to

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Historian Anne M. Boylan identifies the unifying factor between the Union’s press and missionary divisions as their common "pursuit of evangelical influence." As Boylan explains, to effect societal change the American Sunday-School Union realized it had to persuade the American populace to change. Persuasion took the form of influence and the method by which the Union set about to wield this influence was through both the written and the spoken word. See Boylan, Sunday School, p. 68.
ensure the most basic survival of the movement but, more importantly, to broaden the geographic range of the movement's then often indeterminable influence.8

After consultation with and cooperation from a number of regional societies' officers, the leaders who met in Philadelphia in May of 1824 altered the name of the Sunday and Adult School Union so that even its name alone reflected the national scope which they as founders hoped the organization would quickly attain in more concrete form. As the American Sunday-School Union, the institution was hailed by its leaders as

a National society. It furnished a broad and sure foundation upon which to erect a superstructure that should be in name, as well as in fact, a National institution...[which] now offers its advantages to all smaller Sabbath-school associations of every name, in every part of the world.9

Although the phenomenon of a large number of religious societies and schools participating in the formation of a nationalized institution was unknown in the United States before the establishment of the American

8 723 Sunday schools and societies serving 49,619 students and served by 7,300 teachers were united under the Sunday and Adult School Union and assented to its change of name to the American Sunday-School Union in 1824. Most of these organizations were located in Philadelphia and its surrounding counties, but others were active as far away as South Carolina and Rhode Island. Rice, Sunday-School Movement, pp. 447-451.

Sunday-School Union, the idea of a nationwide system of Sunday schools was neither a Philadelphian nor, even more generally, an American innovation. The American Sunday-School Union and its immediate predecessors had origins in the British Sunday school movement which had begun, according to most accounts, in the English city of Gloucester under the auspices of a local newspaper publisher and social reformer, Robert Raikes.10

Robert Raikes drew his inspiration for the establishment of Sunday schools from a desire to challenge and counteract the depressed economic and social realities of mid-eighteenth-century Gloucester. On the eve of the Industrial Revolution, working and living conditions in Gloucester foreshadowed the beginnings of the nineteenth-century oppressive factory system as well as the corresponding growth of the poor and uneducated urban proletariat. Few schools existed for the children of this working class since educational betterment of the masses

10Most scholars identify Raikes as the founder of the modern movement but acknowledge that the growth of Sunday schools in England had already been fostered by several other individuals when Raikes appeared on the scene. The most thorough examination of the history of the American Sunday school movement, its roots, and its manifestations is found in Boylan, Sunday School. Also see Robert L. Church and Michael W. Sedlak, Education in the United States: An Interpretive History (New York: The Free Press, 1976); Newton Edwards and Herman G. Richey, The School in the American Social Order (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1963); Foster, Errand of Mercy; and Robert W. Lynn and Elliott Wright, The Big Little School (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).
was viewed as "economically unsound and socially destructive" by those in positions of authority. The Sunday school model pioneered by Raikes and other British evangelicals during the 1780s was designed to provide basic instruction in the fundamentals of reading, writing, and arithmetic for these poor child laborers. The teaching took place on Sundays since the Christian sabbath was the only day of the week the children were excused from work.  

By his own account, Raikes's original purpose in gathering children in schools on Sundays was simply to "check...[the] deplorable profanation of the sabbath...by...enforce[ing] order and decorum among...little heathens." To prevent them from turning to lives of crime because of ignorance, he sought to teach and discipline Gloucester's uneducated child laborers who, when not working, ran rampant through the city streets exhibiting foul mouths and odious manners. Raikes believed simple instruction would keep the children preoccupied and, consequently, off the streets. The instillation in the Sunday school waifs of a moral character similar to that fostered through formalized

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11Lynn and Wright, Big Little School, p. 4.

education and religious training in the children of the upper classes was a less intended but more eagerly accepted result.

Although Raikes and other Sunday school proponents believed equal access to education should be implemented because such equality would help narrow differences between social classes, they refrained from suggesting this since they knew the proposal would receive few supporters in Britain's hierarchical, very class conscious society. Instead, they appealed to the populace by loudly proclaiming that instructing the masses in Christian virtue would result in a larger benevolent and morally responsible population. Indeed, although the establishment of Sunday schools was often protested by those who feared an educated lower class would become subversive, the rapid growth and spread of the movement was due largely to the widely held belief espoused by Raikes, his colleagues, and ministers of the era: the correlation between the amount of education received and the amount of disruptive (or even criminal) behavior enacted was one of inverse proportions.13

The concept of Sunday schools as promoted by the British migrated in almost carbon copy form to America.

The first record of an organized school is the 1791 establishment in Philadelphia of one of the American Sunday-School Union’s direct predecessors, the First Day Society. Echoing the intentions of Raikes and his counterparts, the founders of the First Day Society devoted themselves almost exclusively to teaching reading and writing to "the offspring of indigent parents, [who] have not proper opportunities of instruction." 14 By the 1820s, though, American Sunday schools departed from the British precedent by democratizing the Sunday school movement. Reflecting America’s claim of equality for all, American Sunday schools broadened their audience to include children of all classes whereas English Sunday schools remained, for all practical purposes, institutions for children of the poor. 15

A shift in focus coincided with this shift in target audience. Evangelical leaders of the American movement recognized its outreach potential and began using the movement as an agent of virtue; that is, as an instrument of what they saw as sorely needed moral purification. The Sunday school, originally a remedial instructor of


15A good discussion of the differences between the British and American Sunday school movements is found in Lynn and Wright, Big Little School, pp. 13-16.
basic fundamentals of education for the poor, became an institution, in the words of the American Sunday-School Union, "eminently adapted to promote the intellectual and moral culture of the nation, to perpetuate...republican and religious institutions, and to reconcile eminent national prosperity with moral purity and future blessedness."  

To achieve this ambitious purpose the Union recognized the need to extend its domain as far as possible. Missionaries headed west embarked from Philadelphia as early as 1821, but Union leaders soon realized that the dissemination of books would achieve faster and further reaching results. Primarily through their own publishing campaign, Union leaders reasoned in 1826, could they become "dictators to the consciences of thousands of immortal beings, on the great and all-important subject of the welfare of their souls."  

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16 ASSU, "Resolution" (Philadelphia: ASSU, 1828), quoted in Lynn and Wright, Big Little School, p. 1.

When the American Sunday-School Union adopted a constitution in 1826, it made one of its primary objectives the publication of religious children's literature. In an enumeration of the organization's goals, the circulation of its children's books "in every part of the land" received a more prominent placement in the mission statement than even the establishment of Sunday schools.  

Both the decision to target children and the decision to do so through books were practical ones: children, because of their innocence and open-mindedness, were the most likely converts, and books could potentially reach more people than any other tool available to the Union. As Union officials themselves explained it, "We address the young because their lifetime is the longest; and with

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books because these can be most rapidly multiplied."²
Once the decision to publish books for a juvenile audience had been made, the American Sunday-School Union approached the enterprise aggressively, especially after the appointment of Frederick A. Packard as Editor of Publications in 1829. Impressive results in the form of sales were apparent within only a few years, and by 1831 the Union's annual report declared that the organization had "no interests of greater magnitude than those connected with the publication of children's books."³

All segments of the American Sunday-School Union, not just the Publications Committee, agreed that the publishing campaign was the organization's overarching priority. Unqualified support for the publication of a distinct Christian children's literature is seen in all types of Union documents—from annual reports to anniversary sermons to committee minutes. The reason for this was that the publishing campaign embodied many, if not all, of the major philosophies of the American Sunday-School Union. It was not the publishing campaign itself

which the Union felt was so important but rather the
unique ability that books had to spread the Union’s mes-
sages of morality to the widest possible audience.

The American Sunday-School Union was persuaded to
launch its own line of children’s books when it was formed
in 1824 because of what Union officials saw as a dangerous
deficiency of good religious books for children. Although
didactic books for children had existed in America since
the seventeenth century, a changing attitude towards
children and childhood at the end of the eighteenth cen-
tury had resulted in a decline in instructive religious
literature. According to scholars who have written
historical surveys of children’s books, although dogma had
not been entirely discarded in books written at the begin-
ing of the nineteenth century, it definitely had been
watered down:

Instead of emphasizing the importance of dog-
matism instruction in the religious training of
the young, a new spirit of indifference to doc-
trinal variations fostered the belief that "one
religion is as good as another". By 1835,

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4Some of the most popular early children’s books included John
Cotton’s Milk for Babes. Drawn Out of the Breasts of both
Testaments. Chiefly, for the spirituall nourishment of Boston
Babes in either England: But may be of like use for any children
(Boston, 1646), James Janeway’s A Token for Children: Being an
Exact Account of the Conversion, Holy, and Exemplary Lives, and
Joyful Deaths of Several Young Children (London, 1671-1672), Cotton
Mather’s A Token for the Children of New England (Boston, 1700),
and The Children’s Bible (Philadelphia, 1763). See Ruth MacDonald,
Literature for Children in England and America from 1646 to 1774
theological concepts were being gradually displaced in religious training by rules for good conduct or by moral stories...A comfortable code of ethics...[was] supplanting those stern theological tenets which had...laid firmly the religious foundation of early American childhood.5

Since the American Sunday-School Union had been formed from the merging of several Protestant denominations, it obviously believed in the validity of each of its sects and was careful to point out its nondenominational nature and to de-emphasize doctrinal variations. It proudly advertised its books as possessing nothing "offensive to denominational...prejudices" and as being "acceptable to any and every Christian mind."6 Union texts never praised one Protestant denomination over another. But the absence of denominational dogmatic distinctions did not mean that the American Sunday-School Union did not want its books to include specific religious teachings. Despite its view that doctrinal variations were unimportant, the Union still believed strongly in religious instruction. Thus, the Union's Publications Committee set out to provide a stricter and more instructive class of juvenile literature than was then currently available to teach children belonging to all


Protestant sects knowledge of the Lord instead of just the spirit of the Lord.

In the 1826 American Sunday-School Union annual report, the Board of Managers described the types of children’s books which it hoped the works of its own publishing campaign would displace from popularity. According to the Board, there were only a few books then available which were "suitable to be placed in the hands of children," and most of those books, according to Union leaders, "were filled with "foolishness, vulgarity and falsehood" and were "deficient in relation to their moral influence." A supporter of the Union condemned books not published by the Union as mere "idle stories of dwarfs and giants, of ghosts and fairies, riddles and fortune telling,—instilling...nonsense, vanity and vice; making impressions...of...mischief...[and] evil [which] is...extensive and most pernicious." One of the Union’s annual reports quoted an eleven-year-old girl who on her deathbed had "begged her mother to be faithful to her other children, and not let them learn silly stories...which only filled their minds with vain thoughts." The Board proclaimed that it was imperative for the newly-formed Union

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8Hall, "Defence," pp. 6-7.
to create its own class of children's books, making them "so abundant as to force out of circulation those which tend to mislead the mind, and to fill it with what must be injurious to it in subsequent life."\textsuperscript{10} The Union deemed that a publishing campaign was necessary to counteract the ill effects of irreligious books which could harm children spiritually. Though such books might amuse a child, they could never "nourish the intellectual or moral nature of a child."\textsuperscript{11}

The American Sunday-School Union was very specific about the subject matter which would be the basis of each and every one of its children's books. The first rule was to secure works of a thoroughly "religious character"; nothing which departed from "sound morality" would be considered for publication.\textsuperscript{12} They wanted Union books to be known for only one thing: the presentation of "the doctrines and precepts of the Bible and the motives to faith and obedience, as persuasively and inoffensively as it can be done with all good fidelity to the soul."\textsuperscript{13} In addition, works must "improve the heart, enlarge the

\textsuperscript{10} ASSU, \textit{Report} (1826), p. v.


\textsuperscript{12} ASSU, \textit{Report} (1831), p. 15.

\textsuperscript{13} ASSU, \textit{Report} (1835), p. 20.
capacity, and excite a taste for intellectual pursuits."\textsuperscript{14} Its books would not cater to children's frivolous inclinations by providing "a class of light and frothy stories to please the fancy and feed the imagination." \textsuperscript{15} Instead, American Sunday-School Union books would be teachers of morals. Indeed, through its books, the American Sunday-School Union hoped to become the "moral educator" of the country.\textsuperscript{16} (Figure 3)

The American Sunday-School Union knew that the class of literature it planned to disseminate would not be as popular as other publishers' more entertaining works. In the 1835 annual report, the Union acknowledged that most children and, in fact, most adults had a distaste for religious reading. The Union optimistically argued that the use and importance of religious knowledge was something which had to be taught and learned. Parents and

\textsuperscript{14}\textit{ASSU, Report} (1831), p. 15. The other requirements that the Union demanded of its books but which will not be discussed to any degree in this study were that the language be appropriate for a child, that the writing be fairly good literature, and that the books be written by American authors specifically for American children as often as possible. See Edwin Wilbur Rice, \textit{The Sunday-School Movement and the American Sunday-School Union} (Philadelphia: ASSU, 1917) p. 141.


Figure 3: American Sunday-School Union Superintendents in front of one of the Union's bookstores; circa 1839. Note the advertising sign which reads, "We Sell Only Clean Wholesome Books." (American Sunday-School Union Papers [ASSU Papers], Presbyterian Historical Society [PHS])
teachers were instructed to convince children of the benefits of reading religious books:

It is true children cannot be forced to read religious books; and it is equally true that they cannot be forced to pray or study the Bible. But means may be used to turn their minds to the subject, and to persuade them to contemplate it in its bearings upon their true happiness and highest interests.\(^{17}\)

Despite being aware of the relative unattractiveness of their works to children, Union officials were determined, at least at the beginning of the publishing campaign, to stand firmly behind the campaign's original goals. The Union vowed that only religious truths would be published, and these truths, although told in story form, would not be embellished or distorted in any way. The Publications Committee was not interested in publishing fiction or science or other similar subjects not directly related to religion which already received, in the committee's opinion, far more attention from other children's book publishers than deserved. In 1837, the character of all Union publications was a subject of the annual report:

We shall continue to aim at giving to every publication we issue the character of direct utility; shaping their sentiments by that system of cardinal truth from which there is no dissent among the great body of Christians, and which is based on the momentous facts that all mankind are sinners, and that the only provision of salvation is through atonement of the Son of God, and the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. We shall continue to discourage whatever has a tendency to excite the love of mere fiction...we shall seek, also, to avoid that course which is worse than romance, that so exaggerates characters and incidents professedly real, as to give untrue representation of facts.¹⁸

Lastly, the American Sunday-School Union did not want its children’s books decorated with too many illustrations for fear that a child would read the book for its pretty look rather than for its admittedly somewhat bitter truths. The Union was determined to create a taste for its books rather than succumb to external pressures which would have forced changes to the original intended purposes and uniqueness of the publishing campaign.¹⁹

The group responsible for ensuring that all books which bore the American Sunday-School Union imprint conformed with the guidelines and goals outlined above was

¹⁸ASSU, Annual Report (Philadelphia: ASSU, 1837), p. 44. Twenty years later, the annual report continued to address the subject of "poisonous literature." Those authors specifically mentioned as having created "evil reading" included Thomas Paine and Percy Bysshe Shelley. See ASSU, Report (1857), p. 12.

¹⁹See Chapter 3 for a discussion of the alterations the American Sunday-School Union ultimately made to its publishing campaign during the course of the nineteenth century.
the Publications Committee. Comprised of the Editor and
five additional elected but unpaid individuals who repre­
represented at least three of the five Protestant denominations
which made up the Union, the Publications Committee met
twice a week to review books for publication. Each book
was reviewed by at least three committee members, each of
whom had two weeks to critique a book before passing it
on. If a reviewer had a question or concern about any
aspect of a book, he recorded it directly on the manu­
script. No book was published unless at least three
members of different denominations approved it; if there
was even one dissenting vote, a book did not go to press.
According to the Publications Committee, this process
worked well since all committee members had "common mo­
tives and the impulse of a common aim." This aim was
articulated in a public address which was printed in the
1825 annual report:

In the selection of works for publication, the
committee have chiefly in view the one grand
object of Gospel truth, and their desire is to
furnish...these glorious truths in the most
palpable and most interesting form, believing
that these, and these alone, can rescue man from
the darkness and miseries of this world, as well
as from the horrors of the world to come, and
that the early inculcation of these will best
promote his happiness on earth and his glory in
heaven.²⁰

²⁰ASSU, Report (1825), p. 33. Also, see Rice, Sunday-School
Movement, p. 143.
In spite of the checks and balances review process, the Publications Committee conceded that it occasionally made errors in judgment. It asked readers not to condemn committee members for these "oversights" and encouraged readers to bring mistakes to the committee's attention so that they could be corrected. In doing so, the committee reasoned, individuals would enjoy the privilege of participating in ensuring the moral well-being of the entire American Christian public and, consequently, the public would be further guaranteed that American Sunday-School Union publications were appropriate for those desiring a "pious education."²¹

So that the public would immediately recognize Union books and be aware that all Union works had been thoroughly examined before being approved for publication, each American Sunday-School Union publication included the Society's imprint (name) and either the statement "revised by the Committee of Publication" or "written for the American Sunday-School Union, and revised" on its title page. (Figure 4) The imprint assured the reader that the book had been approved by the Publications Committee after much thought and that it was of "a decidedly religious

Figure 4: American Sunday-School Union revision statement. Every American Sunday-School Union publication included a revision statement on its cover page. (ASSU Papers, PHS)
character" and included nothing "at variance with evangelical truth." The revision statements indicated whether a previously published book had been adapted by the committee to meet Union standards or whether it had been written especially for the Union and merely edited.

The American Sunday-School Union rarely included an author's name on a published book. This led some critics to declare that the Union misled the public and that it engaged "in mutilating books to fit its union principle." Union managers responded to this allegation in 1831, claiming that by making minor changes to works and in consciously choosing not to list authors, the Union protected writers by accepting sole responsibility for the content of any book bearing the Union imprint:

The declaration which the title page of each of our publications makes, shifts the burden of responsibility for every line and letter upon the Society [the Union], whether the name of the original author is retained or expunged...we esteem every book which is given to the

ASSU, Report (1831), p. 15. One of the American Sunday-School Union's objectives in creating its own children's books was to create a purely American class of books since most books at that time were British imports. In the beginning of the publishing campaign, however, the Union had no immediate access to writers and was therefore forced to revise English children's books as well as books from other countries. When it did so, it indicated the revisions on the title page so that buyers were guaranteed that the book had been revised for American readers. Although dependency on English works was over by 1833, this policy of revising books already published elsewhere continued throughout the Union's publishing campaign, whether the authors were foreign or American. See ASSU, Annual Report (Philadelphia: ASSU, 1833), p. 16.
world... as common property, and claim the liberty to use it in whatever way will best serve the purposes of religious education.23

Throughout the duration of the Union’s publishing campaign, only a few books by famous writers included the author’s name. The Publications Committee wanted its children’s books read not because of who wrote them but because of the Christian precepts they contained.

The American Sunday-School Union chose to market its messages of morality to children for several interconnected reasons. The first and most fundamental of these was that it viewed children as the most receptive to its messages. The fate of the country was seen as being dependent on the instilling of Christian virtues in children. Members of the organization believed strongly that, in order for a person to grow up to be a Christian adult, one had to learn the tenets of Christian behavior and beliefs learned in childhood; "the character of the man is built on principles instilled into the mind of the child."24

The Union used its yearly anniversary celebration, which took place with much fanfare in Philadelphia every Spring, as a platform for echoing this theme time and time again. At the 1836 anniversary event, Reverend James B.

23ASSU, Report (1831), pp. 16-17.
Taylor of Richmond, Virginia set the tone for all sermons which would follow in future years:

The mental and moral training of the rising generation is of utmost importance. It's in the nursery that either morality or unholy habits are learned and imbibed...The mind is taken when impressions may most easily be made. There are no strong prejudices to uproot...the youth drinks in instruction, and under the influence of the Holy Spirit, becomes conformed to the image of the Saviour, and devotes freshness of life to his service...[American Sunday-School Union books] should be more widely distributed to assert their incomparable adaptation to the improvement of the young.25

In the 1845 anniversary sermon entitled "The Importance of Religiously Instructing the Young," Richard S. Storrs preached that the religious character of an individual had to be implanted in the first ten years of life for it to take root. He preached that it was in childhood that "the foundations of the social and religious character which every man carries to the grave" were planted.26 Ten years later, the anniversary sermon had an almost identical title—"The Responsibility of the Church for the Religious Training of the Young"—and a very familiar message: "the religious training and culture of the young should be regarded as a matter of most sacred and urgent


26Richard S. Storrs, "The Importance of Religiously Teaching the Young" (Philadelphia: ASSU, 1845), p. 4.
obligation...the child is the father of the man."^{27}

Because the Union viewed a child's mind as "eager for instruction...more pliable...more teachable, more impressionable, more flexible than the adult's,"^{28} Union leaders believed that a person's soul must be converted in youth to ensure a Christian life. By focusing religious instruction on the future leaders of the country rather than on the current ones, they felt they could have a much more far-reaching impact: "Establish Christian principles in the souls of American youth, and you build our republic upon a rock."^{29} By instructing the country's youth in Christian principles, the Christian character of the country in future generations would be guaranteed. In fact, according to several people who spoke at Union anniversary celebrations, the future of the entire civilization was at stake and depended upon the moral education of the current generation of children. One anniversary speaker delivered a sermon in which he called Union publications "pure, free, sanctified literature" which had

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the power to evangelize the masses and redeem the world, and another warned that if children were not taught the tenets of Christian morals now, the United States would soon experience the same moral corruption ancient Greece and Rome had: "For the sake of our future civilization, gather the children."

The second reason the Union chose to target children as the primary audience for Union books was that it believed that through children, parents also would be reached. In 1831, Union officials commented in the annual report that "[I]t is...to the HOME of the child that we must go to exert...influence, whatever it is, under which we would have the character of the man formed." Children became a vehicle through which the Union hoped its religious teachings would reach a large percentage of the American adult population. The child was viewed as the


31Reverend S.J. Wilson, "Gather the Children" (Philadelphia: ASSU, 1865), p. 15. Several other anniversary sermons also reinforce this same theme of the importance of teaching morality to children. Also see, for example, Albert Barnes, "Christianity as applied to the Mind of a Child in the Sunday-School" (Philadelphia: ASSU 1850); Frederick A. Packard, "The Relations of Religion To What Are Called 'Diseases of the Mind'" (Philadelphia: J.W. Moore, 1850); Reverend M.S. Hutton, "Importance of The Early Conversion of Children" (Philadelphia: ASSU, 1851); and Herman Humphrey, "The Way to Bless and Save Our Country" (Philadelphia: ASSU, 1860).

initial recipient of American Sunday-School Union publications, but when books were brought home, it was hoped that their messages would be imbibed by entire families. A reference to this intended broad-based impact of the American Sunday-School Union's children's literature was published as early as 1830 in an essay on the value of Sunday school learning:

Nor will children...long attend a Sunday-school before the parents will discover that learning is a...valuable gift...and they may wish their offspring to impart to them knowledge...A two-fold object is thus accomplished--the children are taught and the parents are awakened.\textsuperscript{33}

The Union began to see children as some of their most effective and influential representatives. A letter from a Connecticut Sunday school, which was excerpted in one of the annual reports, recounted an incident of a small boy "from an ignorant and vicious family" who took American Sunday-School Union books home for his grandmother; "Thus, a little ignorant boy became a missionary to an old woman, probably but little above the heathen."\textsuperscript{34} Similar stories were highlighted over and over again in Union reports and public statements in an attempt to market

\textsuperscript{33}A.H. Davis, "Observations on the Religious Instruction of Youth, Principally with A Reference to Sunday Schools" (Philadelphia: ASSU, 1830), p. 74. Also see J.P.K. Henshaw, "The Usefulness of Sunday-schools" (Philadelphia: ASSU, 1833).

\textsuperscript{34}ASSU, \textit{Report} (1837), p. iv.
Union books as much more than a class of literature just for children. If promoted properly by Sunday school teachers, the Union thought, its books could become a means of transforming entire families from non-believers to active practitioners of Christianity.35

The American Sunday-School Union believed that children's books could effect a positive change in the morals not just of parents but of the nation as a whole. This was the third major reason why the Union chose children's books as its tools of conversion. Wanting to be known as a publisher of juvenile literature, the American Sunday-School Union never publicly marketed its books specifically to adults, but internally it recognized and took advantage of the great potential its children's books had for influencing all adults, not just parents or families of Sunday school scholars.

In an 1837 treatise on Union publications, for instance, the Publications Committee acknowledged that the characteristics of Union books which most appealed to children would also be "the means of attracting and benefiting...elders...For though the child cannot understand

35For further support of the idea of children being the teachers of parents, also see Reverend H.A. Boardman, "Not 'This OR That' But This AND That: The Union Principle Though UnDenominational Not AntiDenominational" (Philadelphia: ASSU, 1858); Hutton, "Early Conversion"; and Reverend Charles S. Robinson, "The Children of the Kingdom" (Philadelphia: ASSU, 1863).
the man's book, the man can understand the child's."\textsuperscript{36} Through children would follow the "moral transformation of the world."\textsuperscript{37} According to Publications Committee Editor-in-Chief Frederick Packard, it was a mistake to view American Sunday-School Union publications as only for children. In his opinion and in the opinion of the many who spoke in support of the children's literature publishing campaign year after year, the same works which provided spiritual nourishment for children also provided the same for adults. American Sunday-School Union publications were unique in their capacity to reach both audiences at different levels. Wrote Packard, "There is a nurture in the 'milk for babes', from which the transition to the 'strong meat for men' is almost imperceptible."

The Union always remained a publisher of children's books, but it sought to make those books the tools of converting a much larger population.\textsuperscript{38}

Originally, the children's books published by the American Sunday-School Union were meant to go hand in hand with the development of new Sunday schools. The Union

\textsuperscript{36}Humphrey, "The Way to Bless," p. 7.

\textsuperscript{37}ASSU, \textit{Design}, pp. 14, 17.

\textsuperscript{38}Packard, "Relations of Religion," p. 31. See Chapter 3 for a discussion of the tactics used by the American Sunday-School Union to use its publications to reach an audience beyond children without ever specifically targeting any group except children.
published its books for use in its own Sunday schools as well as for use in Sunday schools not directly associated with the Union, and books were very specifically marketed this way. During the first few years, in fact, the only books published by the Union were books to be used as part of the Sunday school curriculum such as lesson books, hymn books, catechisms, and books for Sunday school teachers. Quickly, Union publications became the only material used in Sunday school curriculums. A large number of schools became completely dependent on Union works. 39

Books were distributed to Sunday schools nationwide in two main ways. The preferred method was via an actual missionary. The publishing and missionary divisions of the American Sunday-School Union were interdependent. The Publications Committee depended on missionaries for the sale and distribution of its books, and, indeed, missionaries were largely responsible for creating a demand for Union books by setting up Sunday schools in the communities they traveled to throughout the country. At the same time, missionaries could not do their jobs without Union publications. It was crucial to the Union’s goals that the teachings of the missionaries continue after they had moved on to another community. In many cases, the only way this was accomplished was through

the dissemination of the Union's publications. Both missionaries and the Publications Committee agreed that "[A] book will be read when distance has removed the instructions of him who gave it." In his 1859 anniversary sermon, Reverend Charles Wadsworth called the American Sunday-School Union "one of those great moral forces...planting a spiritual soldiery...of moral fortification all over the land." The two tools of this powerful force, according to Wadsworth, were "the living missionary and the printing press."

The American Sunday-School Union hired its first missionary--Reverend William C. Blair--in 1821. In one year, Blair traveled over 2,500 miles through six states between Pennsylvania and North Carolina and reported that during that time he had founded sixty-one Sunday schools. His successes convinced the Union that paid missionaries should be a permanent fixture within the organization, a policy which was officially adopted when the Union incorporated in 1824.

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40 ASSU, The British Officer: A Narrative of the Character and Death of Mr. Tucker Mends. Who was Killed at the Siege of Algiers (Philadelphia: ASSU, 1830), p. 19.

41 Wadsworth, "Indispensableness," pp. 43-45.

42 Rice, Sunday-School Movement, pp. 68-69. Although missionaries were paid, they were not paid much. According to payment records in the Publication Committee reports, in 1855, John McCarthy in Arkansas was paid twenty-five dollars a month. See ASSU, Depository Committee Records (1855), microfilm reel 77, #41.
From 1824 on, the missionary department expanded very quickly. In 1830, the Union sent missionaries to what was then the country’s western frontier (the Mississippi Valley). Four years after that, it launched a missionary enterprise in the south. As its missionaries spread the Union name and its children’s books far and wide, the American Sunday-School Union received requests from other missionaries stationed around the world in places such as France, Brazil, Ceylon, China, India, and the Sandwich Islands, for Union literature. A missionary in Constantinople, for example, ordered two sets of all Union books. In response, in 1835 the Union’s Board of Managers passed a resolution to raise money "for the purpose of supplying foreign missionary stations, sustained by American churches, with sets of the Society’s publications...to assist in carrying the Gospel to every family in the world." This was a radical step for the Union because until this time, it had raised money and given donations only for the establishment of Sunday schools not the distribution of books. Due to the efforts of the Union’s missionaries, the publishing campaign

became the organization's undisputed priority, and the books themselves became the Union's most widely traveled missionaries.44

The Union gave each of its missionaries a set of guidelines which outlined what was expected of someone who represented the organization. According to this manual, the Publications Committee preferred missionaries who were neither "very young" nor "considerably advanced" in age but rather right in between so that they had both the endurance and the life experience which the Union deemed necessary for the job. (The one time the Union actively recruited college students as missionaries was during a financial crisis in 1837. Students volunteered their time over school vacations and in one year organized 909 Sunday schools and distributed over 200,000 Union books.45) A missionary's character had to "be above suspicion or reproach"; his manners "courteous"; and his habits "industrious." A sense of humor was an asset and a respect for differing opinions a necessity. Finally, "he should feel the worth of the institution to the country and the

44ASSU, *Publication Committee Minutes and Reports*, July 17, 1829.

45Petersen, *Brief History*, p. 12.
The Union even tried to dictate a missionary’s mode of transportation. Most missionaries, especially those in the west, traveled by horseback (Figure 5), even though instructions from Philadelphia warned that

a horse tempts one to go too fast. Besides, the missionary is generally welcome, because he can talk as well as eat. His horse is unwelcome, because he eats but cannot talk. Better than beast or buggy were a walking staff and a good satchel well stored with specimens of library books and catalogues to show, and miscellaneous books to sell, and tracts and papers to give away.

Missionaries were vitally important to the American Sunday-School Union’s publishing campaign not only for the role they played in the actual distribution of books but also for their reports back to the Union. Missionaries were required to send reports back to Philadelphia monthly accounting for how many miles traveled, how many speeches delivered, how many schools visited, the names of all Sunday school teachers and students spoken to, and the monetary amount of books and other publications sold in

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46 ASSU, Manual for Agents Employed in Procuring Subscribers for the Periodicals of the American Sunday-School Union (Philadelphia: ASSU, 1831), pp. 1-2. The American Sunday-School Union ceased publishing children’s books in 1974 but continues its missionary work today around the world. See Petersen, Brief History, for interesting biographical information as well as entertaining anecdotes about several of the Union’s most successful missionaries.

Figure 5: American Sunday-School Union missionary. Most missionaries traveled by horseback with saddlebags of Union books by their side. (American Missionary Fellowship [AMF] Collection)
the preceding month. These reports also often included important information concerning the Union's publications. A missionary wrote from Myersburg, Pennsylvania in 1855, for instance, that the Union's children's newspapers were not selling well because people "nearly always wanted to lay out their money in books, instead of papers. They thought books would do the children more good, for the papers were more easily torn." Based in part on this and other similar reports from missionaries, one of these newspapers was discontinued four years later. Another missionary wrote from Louisville, Kentucky in 1856 asking that American Sunday-School Union books be sent to a community where he had counted twenty-four families "destitute of all religious books." He wanted to start two Sunday schools in the town, but he had no books with which to do so. He pleaded, "Will you not help to keep it [the proposed Sunday school] full [with books] that when these destitute children cry for the bread of life they may not be turned starving away." The same year, a missionary in Tennessee reported that the Union's library

48ASSU, Depository Records (July 3, 1855), microfilm reel 77, number 28. For a brief history of the Union's children's newspapers, see Rice, Sunday-School Movement, pp. 162-165.

49ASSU, Depository Records (November 7, 1856), microfilm reel 77, number 561.
sets were in great demand. In fact, it was through the distribution of these sets that the Union's publishing campaign had its greatest and most widespread impact.

The second manner in which American Sunday-School Union books reached Sunday schools far from Philadelphia was through circulating libraries which were sent through the mail. These free libraries were essential in helping to spread Union publications to those communities which could not afford to buy books. From the start of the publishing campaign, the Union arranged its titles together in groupings which it called "libraries." Each catalogue listed several different "Sunday School Libraries." Each library contained a number of books which were all the same size, the same number of pages, and the same price. Libraries often were separated by reading levels for children of different ages, such as "A Child's Library" and "A Youth's Library." Each library contained an array of titles. A library could be borrowed for a set amount of time (usually a few weeks) or it could be bought. Libraries were held in wooden cases which matched the size of the books within. (Figure 6) Initially, library cases were small since most of the Union's books were only a few inches in width and length, but as Union

\[50\text{ASSU, Depository Records (October 13, 1856), microfilm reel 77, number 53.}\]
books got larger as the century progressed, so did the library cases. (Figure 7)

The Union published regulations regarding library procedures. Among the rules were that books should not be loaned out to children for no longer than one week, children should not fold down the corners of a book's pages or deface a book in any way, and books should not be put near the heat of a fire or placed in the hands of a sibling younger than six years old.51

As early as 1827, the importance and success of the Union's libraries was mentioned in the annual report. A Sunday school librarian from Connecticut described American Sunday-School libraries as a "powerful means in improving the youth of our country." Time previously wasted with idle pursuits was now spent poring over books from the library, which were "vastly superior to the trash which was put into the hands of children fifty years ago." In the same report, Union officials asked for donations to prepare more libraries. Only through libraries, "where... the children might be constantly supplied with volumes of

Figure 6: American Sunday-School Union small library with its case. (AMF Collection)
Figure 7: American Sunday-School Union large library with its case. Note the list of library rules printed on the doors. (AMF Collection)
theology and practical piety" would the full potential of Union publications be achieved.52

In 1845, a missionary reported that the "library is of vital importance...at least one-half of the benefits to the children are derived from the library."53 These comments were echoed by another missionary working in Illinois who wrote that the benefits derived from Union libraries were "incalculable." He was certain that the time spent poring over the books in the Sunday school libraries kept children and their parents alike from desecrating the Sabbath.54 The expressed hope of the Union was that the books in its libraries would allow the Sabbath to continue all week long.55

The presence of American Sunday-School Union library books in a Sunday school often was linked to a school's success, while the absence of books often was viewed as the direct cause for a school's failure. Only two years after the publishing campaign began, a Sunday school librarian wrote that "the life-giving and preserving principle of the sabbath school is the library...the

52ASSU, Report (1827), pp. 38, 46.
ardour of children for books is not abated."56 (Figure 8) In 1843, a schoolmaster related that his Sunday school would not function without American Sunday-School Union publications:

I wish I had the power to convey to you the pleasure it gave me...to see your books come...I wish I could convey to you my conviction of the absolute necessity of good Sunday school libraries. I look upon the library as essential to the continuance of the system of Sunday school instruction in this country...it is utterly impossible to keep up the interest...without a library of books...you can hardly imagine how they create a taste for reading, and instruct and improve church members in this destitute land.57

In 1858, over thirty years after the Union’s publishing campaign began, the Union’s annual report focused on the continued power of its children’s books. The report stated that teachers and students alike returned again and again to the Sunday school because of Union books--teachers for the lessons imbued in the books and students for the joy of reading and learning from them. The report ended by praising the power the Union libraries had to teach morals:

Figure 8: Woodcut illustration of a Sunday school class using a set of library books. Sunday schools became completely dependent on American Sunday-School Union books for their curriculum. (AMF Collection)
The library, which is thus the centre of attraction and bond of union, affords the means of intellectual and moral culture. It is a reservoir out of which flows regularly the water of life, gladdening and fructifying the barren waste and beautifying our moral landscape with loveliness and hope.⁵⁸

According to missionaries, the Union's books became the reason children went to Sunday school. The silent teaching of the printed page was sometimes more instructive than the Sunday school teacher. Without books, children lost interest. When children stopped going to Sunday school, the missionaries argued, they and their families might be lost forever. Missionaries from throughout the country wrote that the fate of Sunday schools was dependent on the existence of American Sunday-School Union library books. The Union received innumerable requests for the free libraries from Sunday schools with no funds to buy books, but the Union never had enough to supply all who asked. A missionary from Illinois wrote that his Sunday school was in trouble because it could not afford to buy a fresh supply of books:

Should the want of books cause our school to languish or be dissolved, it will be very difficult to resuscitate it. The little library is pretty well gone through, and something is

absolutely requisite to retain the interest of the children.59

The Sunday school library and, more specifically, the books it contained, became, in effect, adjunct Sunday school teachers. Initially meant to supplement Sunday school learning, American Sunday-School Union publications became the foundation for most if not all of the Sunday school curriculum.

Via its books, the American Sunday-School Union planned to convert to a Christian life-style not just the children for whom the books were initially intended but the whole world as well. The Union's children's books became the most tangible manifestation of Union principle and philosophy. Wherever the books went, Union ideas and morals went also. In 1831, the annual report pleaded for Christian citizens in all parts of the country to work with the Union to reach its goals of bringing Christianity to the masses. It encouraged its supporters to circulate Union publications widely and to buy Union books for local Sunday schools:

Our library and text books fully sustain and carry out the principles of the society. They teach those truths of the gospel which the Spirit of God employs to convert and sanctify the soul...Give to the children of the western world the power to read our books, and,...we

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will be responsible that neither popery nor infidelity shall reign there.⁶⁰

During the ensuing thirty years, American Sunday-School Union books underwent several changes which will be described and discussed in the next chapter. These changes occurred when Union leaders realized that the organization's very existence was virtually completely dependent on the success of its publishing campaign. If the publishing campaign had faltered, the American Sunday-School Union would have failed. Therefore, changes were enacted to ensure the success of the publishing campaign, and in so doing the continuation of the Union itself as well as its ideology was also guaranteed. As the next chapter will show, in spite of the alterations the American Sunday-School Union was forced to make to its books, the Union's underlying philosophy of spreading the word of the Lord to the world remained intact.

Chapter 4

"MEAT FOR MEN": ADAPTATIONS TO THE AMERICAN SUNDAY-SCHOOL UNION'S PUBLISHING CAMPAIGN

During the tenure of the American Sunday-School Union Publications Committee's first editor, Edward Packard (1829-1867), the Committee never wavered in published speeches and writings from the mission statements which had been proclaimed by and established for the American Sunday-School Union as a whole. In the 1845 Publications Committee catalogue of books, for example, the five objectives of the organization were spelled out:

I. To concentrate the efforts of Sabbath-school societies in different sections of our country.
II. To strengthen the hands of the friends of religious instruction on the Lord's day. III. To disseminate useful information. IV. To circulate moral and religious publications in every part of the land. And lastly, though chiefly, V. To endeavor to plant a Sunday-school wherever there is a population.1

Over and over again the Publications Committee emphasized its role as a participant in the American Sunday-School Union's primary overarching goal of spreading the word of

God through the establishment of Sunday schools. The Publications Committee's specific contribution to this cause was the publication and wide distribution of "moral and religious" texts for use in Sunday schools.

During Packard's editorship, and indeed throughout the entire span of the Union's publishing campaign, the Publications Committee never stopped issuing children's books which they advertised as "moral and religious." As early as 1835, however, the Union began to publish a wider range of books for a wider range of readers. Its domain was no longer only that of bible teaching and scripture, and its target audience was no longer solely Sunday schools and the Sunday school population. The Union continued to publish children's books which were strictly defined as "moral and religious." It was these books which became Union standards and which were read by generation after generation of Sunday-school scholars. But as the nineteenth century progressed, the Union published works which clearly did not fall squarely into this category. As other secular publishers of more enticing juvenile literature arose and competed with the Union for readers and buyers of books, the American Sunday-School Union made certain adaptations to its own publications.

The books were aimed at a less specific, more general audience; subjects other than the Bible were
explored; and the books themselves became much more attractive in a physical sense. The American Sunday-School Union rarely acknowledged these subtle shifts in policy either publicly or internally, but they are evident in Publications Committee minutes, annual catalogues of books, other Union records, and in the books themselves.

What becomes clear, and what seems most noteworthy and significant in these records, is not the fact that the American Sunday-School Union was forced to make changes to its children's books to adapt to changing times and tastes, but how even in the face of these changes, it managed to maintain adherence to Union objectives. In spite of alterations, the Union never forgot and never sacrificed the reason for which it had undertaken a publishing campaign in the first place--to impart Union principles. In one way or another, all publications continued to be based on and imbued with the religious thought on which the Union had been founded. The adaptations which were adopted were implemented to ensure that the Union's message of morality would continue to reach a public which by the second quarter of the nineteenth century had shifted its reading habits. American Sunday-School Union children's books underwent minor changes so that they could compete in a growing market of both sellers and consumers. By the 1830s, people no longer bought
books for the same religious reasons which had prompted them to do so during the previous century. The Union recognized this transformation and made the changes which were necessary for its books to remain a viable choice for a public which was now purchasing books more for pleasure than for religious instruction.

The first changes the American Sunday-School Union made to its children's books were enacted only a few years after the Publications Committee was formed. These first noticeable alterations concerned modifications to the way in which the books were marketed rather than changes to the content of the books themselves.

The American Sunday-School Union published an annual catalogue of books beginning in 1824. It was through these catalogues that missionaries, Sunday schools, other religious organizations, and individuals throughout the country ordered American Sunday-School Union publications. In 1828, the cover of the sixth edition of the catalogue read in part, "Catalogue of Books... Published by the Principal Tract Societies, which are for sale; Together with Miscellaneous Books Suitable for Sunday-School Libraries and General Juvenile Reading."2 By 1835--only eleven years after the Union had been formed and only six years after the Publications Committee had

formalized its publishing campaign—the annual catalogue no longer advertised tracts on its front cover, and the phrase "General Juvenile Reading" had been altered to read simply "General Reading." These two changes, while seemingly subtle, were quite significant.

Tracts were documents which outlined and explained the doctrines of the different Protestant sects. The 1825 annual catalogue advertised tracts of the Episcopal, Baptist, and Methodist churches on page four of a sixteen-page catalogue. By 1835, tracts were not listed anywhere in the 119 pages of that year's annual catalogue. In deciding not to give emphasis to religious tracts, also called catechisms, the Union downplayed the role and influence of the Protestant sects which made up the organization. In doing so, any specific reference to religion was removed from the cover of the Union's most far-reaching and most effective publicity tool. Union officers explained the change this way:

We have...excluded from our catalogue all denominational catechisms...The charge of sectarianism has been sometimes sustained fully by the production of a sectarian catechism...that each denomination can best protect its own standards of faith from mutilation and corruption, and that if the object was simply to

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accommodate the friends of Sunday schools, we might as well keep a supply of evangelical catechisms, without publishing or suffering the imprint of the Society to rest upon them.\(^5\)

Although the Union continued to stock denominational treatises, it no longer advertised them in any way or printed editions with the Union logo on the title page, as had been done previously. The exclusion of tracts from any marketing material made all Union books more inviting to a wider audience, including those groups or individuals who perhaps were not members of the five Christian Protestant denominations represented in the make-up of the American Sunday-School Union.\(^6\)

The Union lured a wider audience to its books in another way by also removing the emphasis and prominent placement of the word "juvenile" from its catalogue covers while simultaneously touting its books as being suitable for adult groups as well as children. From 1835 onwards, the Union proclaimed on the front cover of its annual catalogue:


\(^6\)By 1840, the Union went to even greater efforts to avoid being labeled a denominational organization. In that year's catalogue of books, the Publications Committee stated that although the Union's members by and large were representatives of the Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, or Lutheran Protestant sects, "as an association...we have no connection whatever with any denomination, nor has any denomination any connection with us." See ASSU, Catalogue of Books (Philadelphia: ASSU, 1840), p. 3. Also see Wilhoit, James C. "An Examination of the Educational Principles of An Early Nineteenth-Century Sunday School Curriculum." (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1983), pp. 86-89.
catalogues that its books were appropriate not just for Sunday schools or children but for "Family and Parish Libraries and For General Reading" as well.\(^7\)

Before this time, books were promoted as being for children alone, either through inclusion in a Sunday school library or an individual child’s reading collection. Children’s books remained the staple of Union publications after 1835, but the Union made it quite clear that its books were written for the benefit of parents and adults in general as well as for children. This represented a departure from the Union’s initial goals of creating a distinctive Christian literature aimed very specifically at American youth. "General reading" announced that adults could also enjoy and learn from American Sunday-School Union publications. In fact, by 1840, the preface to the annual catalogue lauded the adaptability of Union publications to all of the different types of individuals found in one home:

It is pertinent to inquire how many thousands of parents might place in their dwellings such a [American Sunday-School Union child’s] library; embracing matter adapted to all ages, from the youngest child that can read, to the parents and domestics of the household.\(^8\)

\(^7\)ASSU, Catalogue (1835), cover.

\(^8\)ASSU, Catalogue (1840), p. 6.
In an undated work found amongst Publications Committee records from the 1830s and 1840s, an anonymous author stated the case even more plainly:

It is an erroneous opinion that the books of the Union are for children only...[they are] universal in their adaptation...The Church is called upon to furnish for the world two classes of books; the one adapted to little children, or persons so ignorant as to need the same kind of reading; the other adapted to adults, or such youth as, by means of Sunday Schools, possess the intelligence commonly attributed to adults. The American Sunday-School Union is supplying both kinds...For though the child cannot understand the man’s book, the man can understand the child’s.9

The annual catalogues were one of the primary ways in which the Union stayed in touch with its subscribers. They served not only as marketing tools—they always advertised a list of current available titles—but they also became a means by which news of Union activities, policies, and announcements reached a wide audience. As Union priorities (or needs to meet unchanging priorities) changed over the course of the nineteenth century and the goal of selling books strictly defined as moral and religious to Sunday schools was replaced with the goal of selling books of a more general nature to anyone who would

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buy them, so did the use and, more specifically, so did the content of each annual catalogue's introductory space.

At the start of the Union's publishing efforts in the 1820s, the annual catalogue often began with a paragraph or page of general information which included updates on the Union's Sunday school enrollment, its committee work, or its missionary work. During these early years, the emphasis of the catalogue's introductory narrative was always on the religious nature of the books for sale and on how the publishing of those books reflected and simultaneously supported broader Union goals.

In 1826, for example, the annual catalogue's introductory space was used by the Publications Committee to explain its philosophy. The Committee members wrote in the catalogue that they recognized that in committing themselves to the publication of what they saw as the nation's only truly moral books for children, they were accepting "the immense responsibility...in becoming dictators to the consciences of thousands of immortal beings, on the great and all-important subject of the welfare of their souls." They went on to explain that to ensure "purity of truth," they would never hesitate to revise books written previously in England or elsewhere abroad which they deemed as containing harmful spiritual flaws:

In the discharge of this critical service, the Committee indulge the hope that their labors will be so far approved by all, that no one will fear to commit to the hands of children works published only after a careful and scrupulous examination by a body who can have no other object in view than the prosperity of Sunday-schools and the promotion of early and pious education.\textsuperscript{11}

In 1829, the annual catalogue began with an explanation of the intricate workings of the Publications Committee. The catalogue described how Committee members were chosen as well as how books were reviewed and edited for publication. They assured readers that their subjective selection process was employed for the sake of the simultaneous salvation and enjoyment of the reader because "[i]n the selection of works for publication, the Committee have chiefly in view the one grand object of gospel truth, and the desire to furnish...these truths in the most palpable and interesting form."\textsuperscript{12} The 1835 catalogue began with a description of the character and design of the Sunday schools where these books were being read. According to the catalogue, the course of instruction in the Union's Sunday schools consisted of "reading, understanding, believing, and obeying the Bible."\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{11}ASSU, Catalogue (1826), p. 2.
\textsuperscript{12}ASSU, Catalogue of Books (Philadelphia: ASSU, 1829), p. 3.
\textsuperscript{13}ASSU, Catalogue (1835), p. 5.
By 1840, however, the catalogue of books began with a segment entitled "Testimonies." These were, for all intents and purposes, advertisements for the list of books which followed. Just as the changes which had been made to the cover pages of the catalogues a few years before had de-emphasized the religious character of the Union and its books and had consequently made the books accessible to a more general audience, the changes to the introductory space served the same purpose.

Details about the Union's beliefs and the Publications Committee's high moral standards for its books did not disappear from the annual catalogue of 1840 or those thereafter by any means, but such information was pushed further and further back into the small print and, in some cases, the literal back pages of the catalogue, while the space immediately visible in the front of the catalogue became entirely devoted to favorable reviews called testimonies. These testimonies, written by a variety of individuals and excerpted from newspaper reviews from across the country and abroad, all stressed the importance of Union publications without necessarily making specific mention of the books' religious character. One gentleman whose letter was quoted as a testimony wrote, "I know of no other collection of books that contain so much important and interesting matter, in a form so attractive and
inoffensive to all classes and descriptions of persons."
Another testimony reiterated the idea which the Union itself had stressed concerning the nondenominational and therefore open-minded and general character of the works:
"They are fitted for youth of all ages, classes, and characters...without anything to offend...denominational preferences, they may be introduced with propriety into every school and family in the country."¹⁴

Once again, the change made to the publishing campaign was made at the surface level. The books themselves did not change; the way in which they were promoted did. The introductory space no longer served as a place where the Union described the unique religious nature of American Sunday-School Union books. Instead, it functioned almost solely as a place to advertise books in a very general way. The books no longer were championed as tools of the Union’s goals to convert the world to Christianity, but rather were lauded simply as good and entertaining books for all children and all parents.

Testimonies were relegated to the very back of the annual catalogues of books by the 1860s when the Union’s primary concern became the actual sale of its publications. By then, the catalogue was just that—a catalogue of books for sale. The introductory space was used just

¹⁴ASSU, Catalogue (1840), p. 3.
as it is still used by any sales catalogue—to tell readers where the merchandise advertised within is available for purchase.\textsuperscript{15} Whereas the 1840 catalogue was preceded by eight pages of introductory material, which included statements of Union beliefs as well as several imploring testimonies, the 1863 catalogue’s table of contents, list of Union objectives, and statement about the nondenominational nature of Union publications were all contained on the first page. The second page listed books organized by price (ten cents, twelve cents, twenty cents, etcetera) and was followed by additional book groupings and price lists. The primary function of the annual catalogue had changed and, consequently, once again so had the content of the introductory space. In effect, the space no longer existed because it was no longer needed.\textsuperscript{16}

In the first decades of the publishing campaign, the introductory space had served to introduce prospective readers to the Union as an organization in addition to describing the religious merits of some of its publications. In the 1860s, the Union no longer found it necessary to do either of these things. By 1860 the American

\textsuperscript{15}According to the 1860 catalogue, American Sunday-School Union publications could "be obtained through all the principal Book-sellers in the United States." ASSU, \textit{Catalogue of Books} (Philadelphia: ASSU, 1860), cover.

Sunday-School Union was flourishing, so there was no need to familiarize the public with what the institution stood for. Similarly, many of the Union titles were being read by a third or even fourth generation of children by this time, so there was no need to convince the public of the value of Union books. The American Sunday-School Union imprint was reason enough for Sunday schools and many families to purchase Union books; therefore, testimonies and a long explanation of Union philosophy would in a sense have been wasted space. Instead, the space was used to categorize and price each and every title available for the convenience of prospective buyers. Titles did not change (although new ones were issued on a fairly regular basis), but the manner in which they were publicized was modified, having become less missionary-like and more practical and business-like.

Every title available from the Union, whether it was a new book authored by a writer commissioned by the Union or was instead a book which the Union had revised to meet its standards, was listed in the annual catalogue. One of the first annual catalogues of books, which was issued in 1825, contained the following category headings: lessons, tickets, hymn books, catechisms, books for Sunday school teachers, Sunday school requisites, Sunday school libraries, and a periodical for Sunday scholars.

The sole purpose of the Union press at this time was to provide books and pamphlets of a religious nature which could be used in the Union's growing number of Sunday schools. Not a single book not considered a must for the Sunday school library was listed in this catalogue. Each and every book had the words "Sunday school" associated with it in one way or another. A small selection of titles was accompanied by excerpts from reviews which had appeared in a variety of Christian organizations' newspapers or magazines. The excerpt always stressed the high moral quality of the book's content, the need for the book in the Sunday school curriculum, and oftentimes both. A review by the London Sunday School Teacher's Magazine of *The Catechist, a Fragment Parable of the Unjust Steward* read:

> The author has displayed much genuine piety, acquaintance with the intent and meaning of Scripture, and has deduced from the parable the useful lessons its divine author intended to convey. We would earnestly recommend it as very suitable for children in the higher [Sunday

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17ASSU, *Catalogue* (1825), pp. 1-16.
school] classes, and especially to such as may in time be elevated to the rank of [Sunday school] teachers, as they will find in it many useful hints for conversing with children on religious topics.18

By 1835, the number of books issued by the American Sunday-School Union had grown drastically. Whereas approximately 400 titles had been available in a sixteen-page catalogue ten years earlier, the catalogue now ran for 119 pages and included over 2,000 titles. The category headings now included spelling and reading books, reward tickets, Sunday school requisites, hymns and music, geography and maps, Union Questions, textbooks and cards for infant schools, dictionaries, Bibles and testaments, miniature books, periodicals, gratuitous pamphlets, books in German, and books in French.19 The Union recognized that not all of its publications were appropriate for Sabbath day reading so it adopted two different labels which it affixed to the inside covers of books; one read "Sabbath Day Reading" and the other read "Week Day Reading" so that Sabbath day books could be quickly distinguished from those books "not decidedly of a

18ASSU, Catalogue (1825), p. 11.

19ASSU, Catalogue (1835), pp. 1-119. Part of the reason for the increased length of the 1835 catalogue was that a description of the book, which was most times short but sometimes quite lengthy, followed each title. No descriptions were included in the 1825 catalogue. Also see ASSU, Catalogue (1825).
Despite some broadening of subject material in the 1835 catalogue, even the books listed under the new categories were advertised as materials which directly supported the Sunday school curriculum. *Geography of the Bible* in the "Geography and Maps" section, for example, was marketed as having been "designed as a manual for Sunday-school teachers and pupils, and a book of reference for Biblical students generally." According to Publications Committee minutes, a similar map advertised the previous year—*Moral Map of the World*—was published in response to a recognized Sunday school need:

The Committee learn with great pleasure that a very considerable excitement has been produced lately in the minds of Sunday school teachers and others respecting the moral state of the world, and their obligation to keep that state in constant view...In order to furnish that means of informing themselves, and their pupils on subjects of this character, it is agreed that a map be prepared representing the moral condition of the earth.22

Other titles which at first glance may have been perceived as unusual territory for a religious publishing concern were in actuality also imbued with moral thought.


22ASSU, "Publications Committee Minutes and Reports" (Philadelphia: ASSU, February 12, 1834), n.p.
A set of cards for very young children teaching them about vegetables, for instance, was "designed to illustrate passages in 'First lessons on the Great Principles of Religion.'" Similarly, The Farming Cards, which depicted farmers in various stages of work, connected the work ethic to religious instruction.\(^2^3\)

In addition to instructional Sunday school materials, the 1835 catalogue also included a large selection of books to be added to a Sunday school's general library. In other words, these books were neither designed nor advertised as part of the Union's strict Sunday school curriculum. Still, such books also usually were based on biblical scripture and were intended to teach children about the Bible or the importance of being dutiful. Jane and her Brother William featured two children learning about and discussing Bible passages; The Stilts explained the harsh consequences of disobeying one's parents; George and Lucy taught children "the advantages of self-denial;" and First Day of the Week defined the duties each person was responsible for on the Sabbath.\(^2^4\) No matter what a book's title or what category a book may have been listed under, it remained clear throughout the 1830s that the

\(^{23}\) ASSU, Catalogue (1835), pp. 93-94.

\(^{24}\) ASSU, Catalogue (1835), pp. 9, 11, 25, 51.
American Sunday-School Union was a publisher and purveyor of Christian thought.

By the 1840s, when testimonies appeared in the annual catalogues, the matter-of-fact tone of the catalogues shifted to one of urgency with almost every testimonial suggesting that the purchase of Union books could lead to widespread salvation. In the midst of widening the subject matter and adding decorative aspects to its books for the first time (Decoration will be discussed later in this chapter.), the Publications Committee assured and reminded readers, possible buyers, and perhaps also themselves that all American Sunday-School Union materials were still based on religious doctrine. Much more than in the preceding decade, the redeeming quality of the publications was highlighted and used as a selling point. For instance, James B. Taylor, Reverend of the Baptist Church in Richmond, Virginia hailed Union books in the 1840 catalogue as instruments of God and pleaded for more people to buy them:

The providence of God most loudly calls on the American public to give a more extensive circulation to these volumes. An engine of incalculable, yet salutary power is furnished, and it may at will be made to operate with continually increasing force...look at these facilities for effecting extensive good to their country and the world. A single man may, through these volumes, be the instrument of making impressions on a thousand minds...here is an enterprise
which promises to improve the intellect and morals of the present age.  

The decision on the part of the Publications Committee to renew advertising emphasis on the religious nature of its books occurred perhaps not too surprisingly at the same time that the book lists in the annual catalogues became diluted with a wider range of subject material than ever before. The Union found it impossible to keep up with the growing number of secular publishers without expanding their own offerings. Fiction, history, biography, poetry, travel, and science and art all were now subjects of American Sunday-School Union publications. Specific titles included Captive in Ceylon, which described a man's captivity among the natives of Ceylon for twenty years; Common Sights in Town and Country, a pictorial journey through country and city; Delaware and Iroquois Indians, which related the history of these two groups of Native Americans; and The Senses and the Mind, which explored scientific knowledge of the five senses. 

Some critics who had previously supported the Union's publishing campaign now attacked the Union for

\[25\] ASSU, Catalogue (1840), p. 3.

publishing works which went beyond, in their minds, the previously enforced boundaries of "moral and religious" literature. In 1849, the Union was criticized by Reverend Herman Hooker of Philadelphia who saw the expanded book list not as a noble attempt to spread moral works to a wider audience but instead as a result of the Union's "competition to do business." In his opinion, the American Sunday-School Union had "been tempted in its strength to depart its design and become a large book-publishing... money-making, secular concern." Indeed, in the 1840s the Union opened a commercial bookstore on the ground floor of its Chestnut Street building in Philadelphia to promote sales of its publications. (Figure 9)

The category of books criticized most by Hooker and others was fiction. In the annual catalogues from 1840 through 1865, there were abundant examples of works which taught religious truths but which were themselves fictitious. Hooker believed that the American Sunday-School Union and other book-publishing religious organizations published fictitious works in great numbers because

27 Herman Hooker, "An Appeal to the Christian Public, on the Evil and Impolicy of the Church Engaging in Merchandise; and Setting Forth the Wrong Done to Booksellers, and the Extravagance, Inutility, and Evil-Working, of Charity Publication Societies" (Philadelphia: King and Baird Printers, 1849), pp. 4, 19.
Figure 9: The American Sunday-School Union Publications Shipping Room; circa 1860. (American Sunday-School Union Papers [ASSU Papers], Presbyterian Historical Society [PHS])

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fictitious works were the biggest money-makers. Much of his argument against fiction was based on his moral objection to religious societies profiting from the sale of children's books. Selling works of fiction with the Union imprint, according to Hooker, was "preying on the pious charity of the public." Not only were Union books priced higher than an average bookseller would sell them for, he reported, but the profits were used to publish additional works of fiction rather than the religious types of works which the American Sunday-School Union and other religious organizations had originally been entrusted with. Hooker pleaded with

the religious public to withhold [sic] all their charities from these publishing institutions; to force them to live by the economical management of their business, as other men do, or fail...
You have given them funds to begin with; that was more than your duty: let them now live by their own strength, and you will soon see if they make books cheaper...You will learn that the only voice that calls on you for charity is tuned by the profits made in your employ.28

Reverend Hooker's disapproval of the Union's fictitious works also grew out of his objections to fiction in general. He believed that fiction and, more specifically, the Union's involvement in and perpetuation of it perverted Christianity. He argued that children needed

only a few good moral books rather than the multitude and variety of titles the Union and other publishers made available to them. "I was once a child," he wrote, "and I got up to manhood without these helps, and I do not know that it took me longer than it does children now-a-days... the reading of such books is going to make nobody wise." 

Hooker acknowledged fiction's popularity among children and parents alike, but he maintained that it had no educational or instructional value and that it did not merit inclusion in any religious curriculum. He wrote:

One seed of knowledge planted in the heart, one principle of truth mastered in the mind, is worth more as a basis of moral and intellectual growth, than all these societies can do by their fictions and stories... All light and fictitious works should be expelled from the service of religion. They create a false taste, and a distaste for more improving books. Their evil effect extends into the manhood and womanhood of the rising generation, and makes it less reliable, less stable, and less self-productive. Because such fictions please children, is no reason why they should have them.

In 1870, a Presbyterian clergyman named George B. Bacon touched on children's books of fiction in a series of articles which he published under one heading—"The Literature of Our Sunday-Schools"—in which he reviewed religious children's books from the previous thirty years.

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In his opinion, Sunday school books, including those published by the American Sunday-School Union, had undergone a transformation during the last few decades in which they had gone from "grave to gay." He wrote that the great majority of children's books in the modern Sunday school were fiction. Surprisingly, however, he did not object to fiction, as Hooker did, simply because it was not religious truth. In fact, he found fiction in and of itself acceptable; it was the "inane" religious fiction produced by the Union and other similar organizations which he objected to on the grounds that it was "stale and mouldy to begin with" and that it put forth "bad religion." In his opinion, good fiction was better than forced religious fiction. He believed that if writers and publishers spent more time on the literary quality of both their fictional and religious books and less time trying to make fictions look like something they were not (religious works), both types of books would be improved and children would often choose the fact over the fiction:

Indeed, a healthy child will, almost any time, choose fact instead of fiction...When he has fact, he wants it genuine, and when he has fiction he wants it genuine...Give a child the chance to choose what story you shall tell him, whether true or fictitious, and the chances are

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that he will choose the true one. Fictions made to look like truth, as are most of our religious "juveniles," are looked upon with wholesome aversion until the healthful taste of childhood becomes perverted and debased. There is a patent sense of the imposture, which provokes, in the prosaic, matter-of-fact mind of a hearty and robust boy, a just and natural resentment when he finds that what he has read is false. But fictions which upon their face are only fictions, making their appeal to the imagination, and moving in the unreal world of fancy,--these he will accept and heartily enjoy.²

Bacon recommended that Sunday school libraries, which were essential to the American Sunday-School Union's publishing campaign, should be arranged not by price or by size (the manner in which the Union organized its libraries) but by a fiction/non-fiction (religious) distinction instead. Without any sort of classification, Bacon argued, a buyer did not know which type of publication to expect. Bacon felt the American Sunday-School Union had purposely not separated its books in the way he suggested so that all of its publications would be seen as equally religious. Since he and others felt that all Union publications were not equally grounded in Christian principles, he urged the Union as well as all other religious publishers of children's books to adopt the policy he put forth so that neither strict religious


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books nor good works of fiction would be advertised as something they were not.\footnote{For a discussion of all of Bacon's arguments concerning religious children's literature, see Darling, "Reviewing," pp. 67-71.}

The American Sunday-School Union defended its use of fiction in 1845 when Archibald Alexander, a professor of theology at Princeton Seminary and the author of one of the Union's most popular religious books, \textit{A Pocket Dictionary of the Holy Bible}, wrote a pamphlet entitled "Suggestions in Vindication of Sunday-Schools, But More Especially for the Improvement of Sunday School Books and the Enlargement of the Plan of Instruction." Alexander began his "Vindication" by agreeing that the American Sunday-School Union Publications Committee had been lax in some of its publishing decisions and, consequently, "[T]oo many fictitious stories...some of them containing few lessons of moral or religious instruction" had been made available to children. He continued, however, with a justification of the Publications Committee's intent to publish at least some fiction. It was imperative, he reasoned, that some of what the Union publish be fiction if only for the reason of making American Sunday-School Union publications as
attractive to children as the works of secular publishers were proving to be:

It is impossible to suppress all fictitious writings, or to restrain young people from reading them; is it not then the dictate of wisdom to provide them with such as are not only innocent, but instructive?...the land of fiction is a dangerous ground to travel over...fictitious writings should never be permitted to form the principal reading of the young; and they should be prepared with much judgment and care, and used with great caution.34

In his defense of fiction, Alexander relied on two arguments, the first being the foundation for the second. Alexander used the Bible as evidence for his first argument since he knew opponents of the Union would not want to be seen as opponents of the Bible. To condemn all fiction, he wrote, meant to condemn much of the Bible as well. He recognized that much of the Bible contained fictionalized accounts of real happenings as well as completely fictitious stories. Thus, he argued, in condemning fiction, one was also condemning "various parts of sacred Scripture, and particularly the parables of our Lord Jesus Christ."35


Alexander's second argument was a continuation of this thought. Just as the parables in the Bible were meant to teach rather than to mislead or fool, the American Sunday-School Union's books of fiction were simply "used as a vehicle for important moral instruction."\textsuperscript{36} Although Alexander's view of fiction as simply a channel for getting across moral messages was the same chorus Union officials themselves had sung publicly several years before, there is some indication in internal records that fiction was indeed used by the Union for other more practical or economical reasons.

In a circa 1837 essay on the design of American Sunday-School Union books, Alexander's comments were echoed. The publications were seen as the "instrumentality for converting mankind to God...[N]othing contrary to sound doctrine or morals has been, or will be tolerated."\textsuperscript{37} The 1845 annual report condemned fiction as a destroyer of all morality and the authors of fiction as "men of the loosest and vilest habits."\textsuperscript{38} In Publications Committee records however, a slightly different tone concerning subject matter was sounded. While it is clear that works of


\textsuperscript{37}ASSU, Design, pp. 4, 9.

fiction occasionally stirred up debate within the ranks of the Publications Committee, it is also clear that those advocating the publication of fictitious works much more often than not won out over any dissenters, especially after 1855.

For example, in 1850, notes alongside a title being reviewed by several Publications Committee members read, "Although this is a fiction, it is of that unobjectionable class which will always be sought as vehicles of important truth. It will be very popular and should be printed at once before anyone else gets hold of it."\(^{39}\) Though the anonymous reviewer viewed the book as somewhat questionable, the book's potential selling power seemed to influence his decision to vote yes for publication. When Frederick A. Packard, the Committee's chief editor, reviewed the same book two months later, he wrote in the margin, "I think the fiction is quite gross and would object to it but for Mr. A's unqualified approval."\(^{40}\) In September of 1855, a book entitled *Nellie's Six Months in Boston* was approved despite its "want of religious teaching,"\(^{41}\) and ten years later *In the Field* was approved even

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\(^{41}\) ASSU, "Publication Register," September, 1855, n.p.
though the reviewers recognized it as being "not a very striking or appropriate lesson...after all only a novel."  

By 1860, the category "Fiction" was listed first in the annual catalogue, followed in order by "Theology," "Education," "Miscellany," "Sunday Schools," "Missionary," and further down the list in fourteenth place, "Didactic." The books of fiction continued to be imbued with some ethical or moral, if not religious, thought. But the American Sunday-School Union, in an attempt to retain its audience in the face of a plethora of children's book publishers, did something its founding members had never envisioned. The Union attempted to market the books as much for their entertainment value as for their moral value. For the purpose of actually selling books, the Publications Committee recognized not only the importance of an entertaining inside—the subject matter—but also the beneficial impact of an attractive outside.

Beginning in the late 1830s, many books published by the American Sunday-School Union were decorated with color, gilt bindings, and illustrations. This was in stark contrast to the Union's early publications, which had simple paper covers and the occasional woodcut illustration. (Figure 10) Often, a book's only


illustration had been the Union motto on its cover (Figure 11) since it was because of an abundance of silly, pretty stories that the American Sunday-School Union Publications Committee had set out to publish examples of plain, instructive children's books in the first place. In the 1835 Annual Report, the Publications Committee espoused the view that in popular books "the truth...is so often completely buried in a profusion of anecdote and illustration that it makes little impression on the reader at all; if indeed the presence of it is at all discerned."4

In 1837, the first official endorsement of decorations appeared in an essay which outlined the characteristics of Union publications. In the essay, Union executives boasted of the high quality of drawings, lithographic prints, maps, and engravings which graced the pages of many of their children's books and proudly stated that their works were "embellished with numerous illustrations, cuts, and engravings...inferior to nothing ever published." The essay's anonymous authors reasoned that

Figure 10: Woodcut illustrations from The Union Primer, 1826. Woodcuts were the most elaborate type of illustration used in the American Sunday-School Union’s early publications. (Rare Book Department, Free Library of Philadelphia)
Figure 11: Cover of *The Union Primer*, 1826. In the 1820s and early 1830s, American Sunday-School Union books had simple paper covers. Occasionally, the Union motto would also appear on the cover. (Rare Book Department, Free Library of Philadelphia)
lithographic prints, maps, and engravings which graced the pages of many of their children's books and proudly stated that their works were "embellished with numerous illustrations, cuts, and engravings...inferior to nothing ever published." The essay's anonymous authors reasoned that dull looking books failed to be read. Therefore, "[W]hy should good books be repulsive?" Yet the same essay made clear that although Union books had first-rate decorations, it was not the "exterior...or attractiveness of ornament and illustration" which made the books so valuable. Instead, it was the interior text which taught "sound doctrine or morals."45

At first, the majority of new illustrations were copperplate line engravings. In fact, engravings had been used for minimal decoration since the publishing campaign began in 1824. But as time went on, the ornamentation became more elaborate, and comments in the annual catalogues began to focus almost solely on a book's decorative aspects. The 1835 catalogue repeatedly told readers if a book had "a beautiful frontispiece" or if a work was "bound with morocco backs and marble covers."46 Five years later, books contained a wider variety of decorations which were highlighted in the descriptive listings. Thus,

45ASSU, Design, pp. 7-9.

a prospective buyer learned that *Ermina* was "embellished with several copperplate engravings" and *Election Day* had "illustrations which are for the most part striking, and well calculated to interest the youthful mind."\(^{47}\)

By the 1850s and 1860s, a description of its ornamentation was often the only information provided about a book in the annual catalogues. "Books Bound in Muslin done up in fine muslin bindings with handsome gilt stamps, suitable for presents," for instance, were not described further. (Figure 12) A new series of nursery books received a write-up devoid of any mention of subject matter:

New and Beautiful Toy Books...Coloured...We have just completed a set of beautiful toy books. The designs are from French artists, and very lively and spirited. The engravings are free and chaste, and the rhymes well suited...They are done up in fancy covers, and will be found as cheap, and, we trust, as pleasing to little children as the extravagant and often frightful picture-books which we sometimes see in their little hands.\(^{48}\)

Even some of the stories themselves became filled with not so subtle advertisements for other illustrated American Sunday-School Union publications. *Have You Seen*

\(^{47}\)ASSU, *Catalogue* (1840), p. 28.

\(^{48}\)ASSU, *Catalogue* (1850), pp. 11, 14.
Figure 12: Cover of Pond Lily Stories, 1857. The decoration on this American Sunday-School Union publication is typical of Union books published in the 1850s and 1860s. The cover is stamped blue leather and the title is painted with gilt. (Rare Book Department, Free Library of Philadelphia)
It?, published in 1854, devoted one full chapter to two young girls singing the praises of illustrated Union books, "Have you seen it?...the new book with such beautiful pictures?...Haven't you seen it?...the beautiful square book...with ever so many pictures." Another chapter in the same book cautioned children to choose their books carefully now that religious and irreligious books often looked the same:

Bad books come with all the grace and pretension of good ones. They are beautifully bound and abundantly colored, and seem to be all that a child's heart could wish, and yet they are filled with silly stories or false and wicked thoughts, which lead those astray who read them.

How can we tell a good book from a bad one? One way is to ask our parents and teachers...Girls and boys who attend Sunday-School have an opportunity to get as many good books as they can read.49

By 1860, illustrations were standard in American Sunday-School Union publications. One 1862 book contained 101 engravings50, and lithography and oil colors were used frequently. (Figure 13) Colored plates were a common feature; The Child's Packet was "beautifully printed in


Figure 13: Lithograph illustration from The Happy Family, 1861. Exquisite lithographs became a selling point for American Sunday-School Union Books in the 1860s. (Rare Book Department, Free Library of Philadelphia)
oil colors" and also came in "ornamental wrappers." The "exquisite illustrations" in The Fifteen Stories which Sister Alice Told her Little Brother Johnny were compared in the 1863 catalogue with "the art-gems that grace our best galleries and print-shop windows."

Reverend Herman Hooker, the antagonistic foe of the Union's use of fiction, was also the most vehement protestor of what he viewed as the Union's inappropriate, unnecessary, and unethical use of book decoration. Hooker preached that the American Sunday-School Union had been founded as a religious organization but that it had become a secular organization more interested in selling its books for profit than in publishing them to spread Christian beliefs. He was especially appalled by the fact that the Union had opened up "stores for the retail of general books" and that the desire for proceeds had prompted the Union "to publish...picture and illustrated books; to bind them up in the most expensive styles...[and] to vie in all the arts and expenses of the trade." Ornamenting books made them more expensive to produce and, consequently, more expensive to buy. Using public contributions for such purposes, according to Hooker, was an abuse of

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51 ASSU, Catalogue (1860), p. 33.
52 ASSU, Catalogue (1863), p. 18.
Christian charity, and he labeled the practice "an abominable waste of sacred funds." He felt strongly that the Union should make no money from its sale of books; after all, he argued, providing "cheap" religious knowledge had been the Union's mandate.\(^{53}\)

The first step towards cheaper books, according to Hooker, was the cessation of "all needless expense in ornamenting and illustrating books." The second was to force the Union to return to its original directives by convincing the Christian public to withhold contributions from the American Sunday-School Union. Hooker cautioned his readers:

> You have given them funds to begin with; that was more than your duty; let them now live by their own strength, and you will soon see if they make books cheaper, and learn what you pay for their service. You will learn that the only voice that calls on you for charity is tuned by the profits made in your employ.\(^{54}\)

\(^{53}\)Hooker, "Appeal," pp. 18-20. Hooker was not incorrect in assuming that one of the Union's original aims had been to provide inexpensive books. In essay after essay and sermon after sermon, Union officials and defenders spoke of the goal of having their books reach poor people all across the country through missionary work and the dissemination of free lending libraries. They also advertised some of their books and libraries as "cheap." See ASSU, Catalogue of Books (Philadelphia: ASSU, 1824-1863) and ASSU, Annual Report (Philadelphia: ASSU, 1824-1865).

Reverend Hooker's opposition to decorated books centered on their higher prices, but he also objected to decoration in and of itself. As he had argued about fiction, he found that illustrations detracted from the moral message of the story and that decoration did "the children of the Country more harm than good."\textsuperscript{55} This argument actually mirrored the views of American Sunday-School Union founders who at the commencement of the publishing campaign termed illustrated works of commercial publishers "grossly defective, if not positively injurious."\textsuperscript{56} It is significant, then, that a chronicler of the history of children's books wrote that by the end of the nineteenth century, American Sunday-School Union books, which originally had been designed to instruct, "remained only to allure."\textsuperscript{57}

Members of the Publications Committee would have disagreed with this assessment, but they certainly would have admitted that by mid-century they had realized that in making publishing decisions, they had to balance their religious inclinations with practical ones. In 1842 \textit{The Way of Life} was promoted as enforcing the "doctrines

\textsuperscript{55}Hooker, "Appeal," p. 20.
\textsuperscript{56}ASSU, \textit{Design}, p. 9.
of...holy religion," but the Committee also reported that "[I]t was needful that the desired work should be tastefully embellished; that its title, style, and appearance should be attractive."58 In 1860, members approved a "pretty book [because] it will do very well in ordering terms,"59 and in 1862 an illustrated version of an old book was published to appeal to those "who might not welcome it in a less attractive dress."60 No longer did Union books only have to influence the reader's conscience; to get to that point the book had "to please the eye."61

However, it is important to note that, as was the case with all other alterations the American Sunday-School Union made to its children's books, the use of decoration was undertaken so that the publishing campaign could continue and so that the proceeds derived from it could finance the Union's growing missionary work. Making books attractive in a physical sense was essential if the Union wanted to stay in business. During the nineteenth century, the books which grew in favor were those which

contained the least amount of religious teaching and the most amount of illustrations.

The American Sunday-School Union did not sacrifice the spread of Christian morals when it adopted the use of ornamentation in its children's books. When the Publications Committee admitted and ultimately embraced the saleable quality of color, engravings, and gilt bindings in books, it used these ornaments to its advantage—not as ends unto themselves but as tools of the Union's long-standing goal to provide the country and the world with desirable Christian children's books. The 1863 Catalogue of Books contained listings for hundreds of Sunday school text books, reward books, teacher training books, and hymn books. In addition, its listing of general books was full of books which stressed moral obligations. Many were illustrated and some were fictional, but all were based on Christian ideals if not on strict religious instruction.62

In responding to the public's demand for an entertaining aspect to children's literature, the American Sunday-School Union ensured its own survival. A broader subject base, a wider audience, and use of both fiction and decoration all became instruments of the Union's sustenance—an economic version of the spiritual "milk for babes and meat for men" which it provided so many others

62ASSU, Catalogue (1863).
in the form of religious literature. Not to have made the adaptations to its children’s books that it did would have led to self-defeating martyrdom; after all, the purpose of the publishing campaign was not merely to publish but to use the power of the press to spread the good word of the Lord to the far reaches of the earth. To have published books which would have had no audience would have meant that the Union could not have even attempted to fulfill this goal. Even the Union’s historian saw no need to defend or justify the changes Union leaders made to its children’s books in the middle of the nineteenth century. Instead, when he wrote the Union’s story in 1917, he matter-of-factly acknowledged that "while the Union desired to issue works of the highest possible religious type, it had to produce works that would be read."\footnote{Edwin Wilbur Rice, \textit{The Sunday-School Movement and the American Sunday-School Union 1780-1917} (Philadelphia: ASSU, 1917), p. 145.}
Chapter 5
CONCLUSION

Soon after the American Sunday-School Union began publishing children's books in 1824, the products of its publishing campaign were viewed by many as indispensable to the moral upbringing of the nation's children. The Union's books were the first religious books published in America which were aimed specifically at a juvenile audience, and they met the need of the growing number of Sunday schools which were formed in the wake of the British Sunday school movement during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. In 1828, Willard Hall, the President of a Sunday school association, publicly acknowledged the extent to which the Union had, in a very short time, changed the reading habits of an entire generation of children. Hall thanked the Union's Publications Committee for forcing "out of circulation the trash so pernicious to the tender mind...[which was] heretofore furnished for children," and he went on to say:

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People are not aware of how much this society [the American Sunday-School Union] effects..this society is necessary to provide..instruction. Strike out of existence their publications; and what a blank would be left. Without their continued exertions, these publications would soon be gone, worn out, and their place empty. And where, without the instrumentality of this society, could we find those, who would take the requisite pains to supply suitable books for children; select them with propriety, revise them with care, and divest them of everything unsuitable and improper?¹

During the first forty years of its publishing campaign, the American Sunday-School Union maintained in its anniversary celebration sermons, its annual reports, and its advertising that all of its books embodied the characteristics which Hall and others praised them for: straightforward religious instruction for children. The Union’s book catalogues, Publications Committee records, and the books themselves, however, reveal that although the Union always wanted to make religious instruction for children the focus of its works, as the century progressed, it found that other subjects were better sellers and other audiences were better markets.

The Union, therefore, adopted certain unwritten changes to its original goals for the publishing campaign which enabled formerly deplorable items to be used to the

Union's advantage. Whereas fiction and decoration, for example, initially had been denounced because of the Union's fear that they would distract from the Union's basic Christian message, by 1840 they were embraced as extremely effective carriers of that message. The Union expertly managed to use them so that they worked for rather than against the realization of the Union's main goal—the moral conversion of the world.

If the American Sunday-School Union had not adapted to changing attitudes, changing technologies, and changing tastes by making modifications to its publications, its books would have gone unsold and its publishing campaign would have consequently slowly but surely failed. Since the publishing campaign was merely a means to spread Union ideology, the institution as a whole also would have gradually declined in its impact and influence. Without the proceeds generated from the sale of its children's books, the Union never would have been able to finance its post-Civil War expansion of missionary work, the activity for which it is best known.

In 1974, the American Sunday-School Union, now known as the American Missionary Fellowship, ceased its 150-year-old publishing campaign to devote itself completely to missionary work. (Figure 14) "Milk for babes and meat for men" is now spread primarily through
the spoken word rather than through books. Although the organization is currently thriving, its leaders believe, as did their predecessors, that if all record of their missionary work was suddenly by any possibility expunged, and they had nothing to show for their long years of toil but the books they have provided for the use and improvement of Sunday schools, they would have accomplished a work entirely worthy of the thought, the labor, and the prayers bestowed upon them.²

Figure 14: The American Sunday-School Union survives today as the American Missionary Fellowship in Villanova, Pennsylvania. (American Missionary Fellowship Collection)
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<th>Title</th>
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<td>The History of Joe Bennett and His Friend Thomas.</td>
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