Early American Childhood in the Middle Atlantic Area

Nor the least important phase of our national epic is the changing status of the child in any given section, in relation to home life, the church, the schools, and the community at large. An approach to the interpretation of early American childhood in the Middle Atlantic area may be found in the books provided the children of that region and in the manuals which directed parents and guardians in the training and care of the young. From an examination of this literature, one may trace the revolution in child life during the colonial and early national periods. The brief analysis will include such aspects of childhood as religion, education, manners, health, and recreation. In this procedure the reciprocal behavior patterns of the juvenile and adult worlds will be noted in order to appreciate fully the position of the child in the narrow orbit of his normal experiences.

The little books provided for the young quite clearly reveal that the War for Independence brought not only political freedom to the adult society of the Thirteen States, but stimulated as well the trend towards the emancipation of the youngest patriots. In the last decades of the eighteenth century, childhood slowly rose from its submerged position and shared the advancing status of the new republic, until by 1835 juvenile life rested securely on a basis of
freedom and self-expression. It is true that even with the passing of the first quarter of this century, many conservative adults still failed to comprehend the child's peculiar mentality or to recognize his special needs as an immature human being. Gradually, however, the words: "Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" assumed a new connotation and were applied to the "little men and women" who in previous decades had been denied the advantages of what today would seem to be a carefree, happy childhood. Although more than a century was to elapse before another social revolution would establish youth in its present exalted status, by 1835 the prelude of this upheaval in American society had been enacted. By that time the adult world began to treat the child as a being with a distinct individuality, and by abolishing fear as the dominant factor in the life of the young, sought to provide a serene environment in which boys and girls could move at ease in their relationships with God and man.

While the history of child life in the Middle Atlantic area has been neglected, the story of youth in other sections was repeatedly told by enthusiastic authors even in the early days. Perhaps it was this negligence of writers south of Connecticut that is responsible for the peculiar aura of sanctity which hallows the record of Puritan boys and girls in early New England and leaves some uncertainty regarding childhood in other regions less painfully pious. A case in point may be found in the writings of Cotton Mather, notably in his *Family Well-Ordered*, or in his *Token for the Children of New England*, which portrayed with awe-inspiring fidelity the brief tortured lives of "godly youth" who in the "midst of seeming health dropped down and died." As a supplement to these works, reprints of sermons couched in scorching terms extolled sectional traditions for the perusal of the young "Elect." That colonial New England childhood was supposed to be blessed with superior spiritual and material endowments is evident even to a casual reader. The normal colonial child of the middle section might easily have supposed that prospects for success and happiness in his temporal and eternal life diminished in direct proportion to his distance from Boston. Witness, for example, the thundering exhortations addressed by Samuel Moodey to the youth of Massachusetts:

*Turn ye, turn ye, from your Evil Ways, for why will ye die, O Children of New-
England? Poor Hearts; You are going to Hell indeed: but will it not be a dreadful thing to go to Hell from New-England, from this Land of Light to that Dungeon of Eternal Darkness?¹

The implications seem to be that if the little Christians had participated in the spiritual laxity of other sections, the shock of eternal damnation would not be so great. In spite of this assumption and of the German and Quaker influences in the Middle Colonies, the actual standards for what constituted a "godly life" in the latter region were much the same as those found to the north. Although the stern demands made upon child life in Puritan New England have long been emphasized, adult ideals for the "dutiful child" were strikingly similar farther down the Atlantic coast. While the Quakers were perhaps milder in their speech and more benign in their manner towards the young, since fear was not given special stress in their faith, nevertheless the record shows that they were assiduous in keeping youthful feet on the narrow path of righteousness. Probably the gentle insistence of the Quakers in holding little ones to their spiritual obligations together with their distinctive garb and "plainness" of speech were quite as trying to the young as were the fiery language and dire threats heaped on the heads of Puritan boys and girls; for children loathe being different. Not only did little Quakers sit through the long solemn silences of First Day Meetings, but the youth of the Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist, and other faiths of this area were likewise expected to attend Sabbath services with becoming piety. In their school, farm, and household tasks, children of all these creeds had lofty ideals of perfection held before them.

The boys and girls of the Pennsylvania German families, in particular, exemplified in their lives and works such phrases found in their copybooks as: "By the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat thy bread" or "Order is heaven's first law." Since there was much hard work to be done in their frontier environment, and few hands to do it, no one was permitted to "dawdle"—not even a child. All must be bent on the "serious business of life." To a people facing a hard world, the only hope for survival seemed to lie in training boys and

¹ Samuel Moodey, Judas the Traitor Hung up in Chains. To give Warning to Professors that they Beware of Worldlymindedness, and Hypocrisy; . . . Preached at York in New-England (Boston, 1714), 3.
girls to observe the admonition: "Let thy Recreations be Lawful, Brief, and Seldom." Note, for example, the attitude of Christopher Dock, the gentle Moravian master of the Skippack school in Pennsylvania, in regard to the prospects of his pupils' wasting the precious moments of their noon hour in frivolous play:

As the children carry their dinner, an hour's liberty is given them after dinner. But as they are usually inclined to misapply their time if one is not constantly with them, one or two of them must read a story of the Old Testament, while I write copies for them. This exercise continues during the whole of the noon hour.

Guidebooks for the use of parents in forming the manners of their children prove beyond doubt that the reaction of the young to disciplinary measures remains almost constant throughout the centuries. Colonial children, like those of other times, quite evidently did not always live up to the ideals held before them. In his Essay on the Government of Children, James Nelson, an English author whose works were reprinted and widely read in the Middle Atlantic colonies, said that the term "manners" implied a government of children regulating their conduct by making their actions what they ought to be. For the best results, he advised parents to be "obstinate, good, to set out upon right principles, and then pursue them with spirit and resolution," otherwise the little ones would soon grow too cunning for them, and would take advantage of their weakness. On this point, Nelson wrote:

I have seen children who could not speak, distinguish perfectly those who were disposed to spoil them, from those who were not; scratch faces, break china, and play the tyrant over all who humoured them, and yet not offer to lift a finger against those who did not. By all means let children be played with and have every amusement; but great care must be taken to distinguish play from mischief; innocent freedom from a growing perversity.

Decades later, Charles Cooper expressed much the same sentiments in his tiny volume, Blossoms of Morality, published in Philadelphia in 1810. Cooper deplored the "spoiled" children of the day as well as the "depravity, luxury, and corruption of the times . . . that was rendering the rising generation effeminate." After warning parents that boys and girls "who are permitted from their earliest

2 Anon., The A B C with the Church of England Catechism (Philadelphia, 1785) pages unnumbered.
periods to do wrong, will hardly ever be persuaded to do right,” this work affirmed that it was a maxim with some parents “that their children shall not be checked in their early years, but be indulged in whatever their little hearts shall pant after.” The author also pointed with scorn to the “indulgencies” ordinarily permitted the young apprentice, who, to the disgust of his betters, could be seen “strutting through the streets in his boots on an errand of business, or screening himself from the dew of heaven, under the shade of a silken umbrella.” According to the author, these boys would consider it “worse than sacrilege to appear abroad with an apron before them or in their working dress.” But since the youthful mind delights in ease, finery, and pleasure, adults were directed to check “those juvenile sallies, which if encouraged, would in time be productive of the very evils complained of in the present generation.”

Among the lamented evils of the day, the “folly of going out of one’s element” was indicated to parents as including those occasions:

When your children have their ways
And strange to tell, papa obeys!
When things are managed all so ill
That little Tommy says, “I will!”

John Gay’s fables had long been the favorite reading of American children, if one can judge by their numerous publications in the second half of the eighteenth century. Gay wrote many verses on the blind, misguided attitude of parents for their offspring:

How partial are their doting eyes,
No child is half so fair and wise . . .
Where yet was ever found a mother
Who’d give her booby for another?

Worn copies of Fénelon’s works, particularly On Faithfulness in Little Things, survive to testify to frequent readings by their young owners at the turn of the century. This sage advice reached American boys and girls after being “translated from the French into German and thence into English,” and finally printed by the New

5 Charles Cooper, Blossoms of Morality (Philadelphia, 1810), 154, 155.
6 Ibid.
8 John Gay, Fables (Philadelphia, 1808), 14.
York publisher, Isaac Collins. In one tattered volume, the underscored words of the Archbishop of Cambrai read as follows:

The little occasions to stand firm in the cause of truth come upon us inadvertently; and almost every moment they render it necessary for us without ceasing to maintain a warfare against pride, slothfulness, and a domineering lordly disposition; against precipitancy, impatience, opposing our corrupt wills everywhere and in all things.9

Religion undoubtedly was a basic factor in the establishment of the Middle colonies. Since this section and particularly the Quaker colony of Pennsylvania offered a haven for the followers of many creeds including the Anglicans, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and the German Quietists, the spiritual status of the child in this region offers many complexities. As a whole, the rigid temper of the times set high theological standards for the young of every faith. William Penn, in his advice to his family, indicated the role of religion in the lives of youth, and set the tone for his whole Province in these terms:

... become the Children of Light, put it on as your holy Armour; by which you may see and resist the fiery Darts of Satan's Temptations and overcome his Assaults.10

By 1700, the first flush of religious zeal had abated to some degree, but the inhabitants of this region were still fundamentally a "godly people." Witness the affectionate counsel of the Founder to his followers, the Friends:

Let the fear of the Lord, and a zeal and love to his glory dwell richly in thy heart. ... Be diligent in meetings for worship and discipline ... and let the meetings be kept once a day in the family to wait upon the Lord. ... I love sweetness mixed with gravity, and cheerfulness tempered with sobriety. Religion in the heart leads into this true civility, teaching men and women to be mild and courteous in their behaviour, an accomplishment worthy of praise.11

Compared to any other section of the country, few differences in tone or attitude can be detected in the various Protestant sources—the catechisms, sermons, and lives of holy children—found in the Middle area. Colonial thought patterns were universally theocentric. Within the boundaries of every colony, variations of emphasis in minor points of doctrine may be noted, but the boys and girls of

9 François Fénelon, On Faithfulness in Little Things (New York, 1801), 1.
10 Priscilla Wakefield, A Brief Memoir of the Life of William Penn (New York, 1821), 20,
11 Ibid., 21-23.
every political division grew up in an atmosphere permeated with religion of one type or another. In reference to the obligation binding parents to instruct their children in the tenets of the faith, the Quaker Samuel Fuller wrote in the preface of his catechism:

We ought to omit no opportunity to instruct them betimes in the principles of truth, in order to bring them in their early days to a sense of the unspeakable love and the infinite wisdom and power of the Almighty.\(^\text{12}\)

The same author also pointed out that since the Holy Scriptures contained “a full account of things most surely to be believed . . . ’tis the duty of every Christian to be frequent and diligent in the public reading of them in their families.”\(^\text{13}\) In accordance with the practice of the Friends, Fuller also warned adults against wearying little ones with elaborate disquisitions: “’Tis not thought convenient to amuse their tender minds with too many sublime and controverted points, which can be thoroughly assimilated only later in life.”

There was, indeed, one notable difference in the tone of the juvenile literature of the Philadelphia area, as compared to that of other provinces. Even a casual examination of the former impresses the reader with the existence of a spirit of toleration all too rare in early American society. Many sentiments set down for the guidance of youth would seem to justify the appellation of “the City of Brotherly Love.” Witness for example Anthony Benezet, the renowned teacher in the Quaker schools, who declared to his students:

Humble, merciful, and just souls are everywhere of one religion; and when death hath taken off the mask, they will know one another, tho’ the divers livings they wear here, make them strangers. Grace perfects, but never sours or spoils a nature.\(^\text{14}\)

In contrast to the violent exhortations heard by children of other sections, the devout Benezet wrote to encourage little ones in the spirit of love as the key to their relations with their Creator and their fellow men: “Terrify not the soul with vain fears; neither let thy heart sink within thee, from the phantoms of imagination: From fear proceedeth misfortune; but he that hopeth, keepeth himself.”\(^\text{15}\)

\(^\text{13}\) Ibid., vi.

\(^\text{14}\) Anthony Benezet, *Youth’s Friendly Instructor and Monitor* (Philadelphia, 1779), 118, 119.
\(^\text{15}\) Benezet, *op. cit.*, 127.
The moral education of Pennsylvania youth was by no means a negative process, but rested serenely on a well-defined basis embodied in such rules as the following:

Teach him obedience, and he shall bless thee; teach him modesty and he shall not be ashamed.
Teach him gratitude and he shall receive benefits; teach him charity and he shall gain love.
Teach him temperance and he shall have health; teach him sincerity and his own heart shall not reproach him.
Teach him benevolence and his mind shall be exalted; teach him religion and his death shall be happy.\textsuperscript{16}

In their attempt to revive the compassionate love of neighbors characteristic of “primitive Christianity,” the pietistic sects of Pennsylvania laid particular emphasis on the theological virtue of charity. During the Enlightenment of the early national period, this attitude towards the unfortunate or suffering members of a community functioned in the place of organized philanthropy. Even the little primers stressed the necessity of giving practical expression to the Golden Rule:

\begin{verbatim}
How many children in the street
Half naked I behold!
While I am clothed from head to feet
And covered from the cold.

When I see the blind or lame
Deaf or dumb, I’ll kindly treat them
I deserve to feel the same
If I mock or hurt or cheat them.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{verbatim}

To fortify the young against the inevitable hardships of the New World, and as a recompense for the “plainness” of life advocated by some denominations in the Middle section, children were promised a certain measure of peaceful happiness in the service of God. They were told that the design of the Creator was the happiness of His creatures, but that those who “through folly are miserable, defeat the intention of Providence.” Although it was granted that everyone may be happy, religious writers observed that “scarce any one is so.” This coveted contentment was supposedly in the mind of the

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 123.
\textsuperscript{17} Benjamin Johnson, \textit{New Philadelphia Spelling Book} (Philadelphia, 1809), 32.
individual, and children were counseled to draw upon their patience in "the deficiencies of fortune." John Potter set ethical and spiritual values on adversity:

There is a courage in adversity that can put fortune out of countenance. Men are not despicable by poverty, but by their manner of supporting it. The virtues obtained by adversity teach us good conduct in life, and how to make a proper use of affluence when Providence kindly raises us to the possession of it.  

In the formal exercise of religion, the children of all the denominations of the Middle Atlantic area were accorded the right of church membership. One of the prime obligations of this sacred fellowship was the youth's making a public profession of faith or of his religious experiences as soon as he had attained the use of reason or could distinguish between right and wrong. For the children of the Calvinistic churches this manifestation could take the form of a "baptismal covenant" and the public avowal of a dedication of their minds and hearts to God. For the youth of Anglican or Lutheran creeds, this open profession of faith was made in their early teens at the ceremony of confirmation. Among the pietistic sects, conversion meant not a public rejection of evil, but rather a gradual realization of the "Light of Christ within" which would, they believed, direct the child to truth and to holiness of life. By himself or with the aid of his parents or elders, the child was to make a searching examination of his spiritual assets and liabilities and thus estimate his potentialities for good and evil. At the beginning of his earthly pilgrimage, the young Christian must at all cost be equipped with a knowledge of the effects of sin in his soul, and of the power of the "Inner Light." As the child grew in this wisdom, he was expected to be converted and eventually to arrive at the state of "inner or second birth."  

Infants of Anglican families were "born again" by baptism in which through their sponsors they pledged fidelity to the tenets of their creed, renounced Satan and "all his works and pomps," and sought the inspiration and assistance of the Holy Trinity. Some years later the child learned the basic truths of his spiritual regeneration—that man had lost his divine heritage through the sin of our

19 Walter J. Homan, Children and Quakerism (Berkeley, Calif., 1939), 40, 41.
first parents, but that he had been redeemed by Christ’s passion and death.20

In the wake of the American Revolution came not only a decline in the zeal of orthodox Christians but also a wave of skepticism. This spirit of indifference was evident to a pronounced degree in the older communities along the Atlantic seaboard but more so on the western frontier, where men were free from the restraints and conventions of the more settled communities. Even among the Quakers of Pennsylvania, the growing apathy for the things of the spirit had laid hold of the young. Frederick Smith, in a letter written in 1805 to the “children and youth of the Society of Friends,” lamented the negligence displayed by Quaker parents in the religious training of their children. As a result of this carelessness, he said, the Society had lost much of the plainness that had distinguished their ancestors, and the rising generation was fast acquiring a distaste for the duties of their faith, and were gradually uniting with more liberal Christians. Another indication of the ebb in theological interest could be found in the astounding rate at which the pragmatic philosophy of Poor Richard’s sayings was replacing the Gospel maxims in children’s books.21

In an effort to rekindle the embers of faith, some writers had recourse to the old technique of holding the horrors of damnation before their young readers. Others used an equally terrifying device in compiling case histories of pious boys and girls in which the possibilities of an early death left virtuous youth small hope for longevity. The two classics in this field, published in Philadelphia, were prepared by Mary Pilkington in 1809. Her “moral and instructive examples for the female sex” were enough to arouse disturbing doubts in most young Christian minds:

Beauty nor wit, nor sense can save,
From death’s imperial dart;
’Tis virtue makes an early grave,
Gives comfort to the heart.22

20 Clifton H. Brewer, A History of Religious Education in the Episcopal Church to 1835 (New Haven, 1924), 77.
21 Frederick Smith, A Letter to the Children and Youth of the Society of Friends (Philadelphia, 1806), 2, 3.
22 Mary Pilkington, Biography for Girls; or Moral and Instructive Examples for the Female Sex (Philadelphia, 1809), 21.
Normal boys still attracted to the pleasures of this life could also draw alarming inferences from an epitaph by this same author which closed the account of a devout boy's life:

Struck by stern death's unerring dart,
When every virtue bloomed;
When rich perfection graced his brest,
Then was his heart entombed.  

By the next decade, a more benign attitude on the part of adults not only spared little ones the morbid details of juvenile deaths, but also tried to take the young in spirit beyond the grave to discover the delights awaiting those who on earth had loved their God. In 1812, George Burder in his little volume: *Early Piety; or Memoirs of Children Eminently Serious*, was among the first to question the influence that unhappy accounts of youthful deaths might have on the behavior patterns of normal children. Cautiously referring to the cases of early sanctity described in his work, Burder remarked: "Many of them died very young, (not that they died the sooner because they were good: but being good, they were the sooner fit to die): now you yourself may die young too, therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord, for the pardon of all your sins, and beg for grace to make you fit to live, and then you will be fit to die."  

Sunday School literature of the first decades of the last century was devoted almost entirely to expounding definite sectarian creeds, since each denomination published its own books and magazines. By the early thirties, works devoted to a definite creed were being replaced by those which inculcated only general religious principles acceptable to most denominations. Under the auspices of the American Sunday School Union the innumerable stories produced usually fell into two patterns: the one of the good child, who after converting one or more sinners died an early death; the other, of the unregenerate youth, who, having scorned the admonitions of his parents and the clergy, followed evil ways to the scaffold or to a drunkard's grave.

23 *Biography for Boys; or Characteristic Histories, Calculated to Impress the Youthful Mind with an Admiration of Virtuous Principles, and a Detestation of Vicious Ones* (Philadelphia, 1809), 23.

24 George Burder, *Early Piety; or Memoirs of Children Eminently Serious, Interspersed with Familiar Dialogues, Prayers, Graces, and Hymns* (Baltimore, 1821), iv.
Most of this literature placed great emphasis on “absolute truth,” and thereby questioned the value of fictitious reading for children. Since the expression “to tell a story” was an equivalent term for lying, little “histories” of eminently truthful children who had “died and gone to heaven” were popular publications of the Sunday School Union. One youthful exemplar of veracity was “Little Edward,” who was born in Philadelphia in 1831, and who had found books his chief source of amusement from his fourth year. The point was made that although he read much for one so young, yet if he “knew a story was not all true, he did not care reading it.”

During the first half of the nineteenth century, a deluge of utilitarian philosophy inundated children’s books. Boys and girls were no longer directed to give God a fearful service in order to escape by the narrowest margin the frightful horrors of hell. The new stories counseled them to be good that they might be happy here as well as in eternity. Illustrative of the religious thought that fitted so nicely the needs of a nation busily engaged in a program of unparalleled development, is a “short sermon” on How to Make Money, which was first published in the middle thirties and many times reprinted:

In one sense every man is the maker of his own fortune. All depends upon setting out upon the right principles and among these are:

1. Be industrious. Time and skill are your capital.
2. Be saving. Whatever it be, live within your income.
4. Be resolute. Let your economy be always of today.
5. Be contented and thankful. A cheerful spirit makes labor light, and sleep sweet, and all around happy, which is better than being only rich.

A Philadelphia publication indicative of the new religious status of youth in the thirties gave some advice on the subject of prayer, and warned adults that “prayer should not begin until every sound is hushed, nor should it be continued so as to be in the least degree wearisome.” Little ones were also told that prayer “is the desire of the soul.” In this exercise they were to adore God when they thought of His greatness and goodness; they were to thank Him

for every blessing they enjoyed; they were to ask Him for all they needed; and they were to seek His protection against every evil they feared.\(^{28}\) Such were the general spiritual directions; but from New York came the typical American prayer of the early national period:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Give us a humble active mind} \\
\text{From sloth and folly free;} \\
\text{Give us a cheerful heart, inclin'd} \\
\text{To useful industry.} \\
\text{A faithful memory bestow,} \\
\text{With solid learning store;} \\
\text{And still, O Lord, as more we know,} \\
\text{Let us obey thee more.}\(^{29}\)
\end{align*}
\]

The manners and general behavior of colonial children were determined in part by religious views, but their instruction in such matters was also influenced by secular considerations. One such factor was the fixed determination of adult Americans not to permit the youth of this newly opened country to lapse into the barbarism which ever lurked on the fringe of settlement. Against this constant threat of reversion to a primitive mode of life, the grownups established ironclad rules of behavior and usually directed the young with a firm hand. The policy of thus sternly ordering youthful conduct was outlined in a little handbook for parents entitled: \textit{Cares about the Nurserie}—a work which shaped colonial thought as early as 1702. After explaining the dangers to which boys and girls were constantly exposed, the author exhorts parents:

\begin{quote}
Methinks a little good Breeding may do the Children some Good! They should be taught the rules of Behaviour: Good Manners do well become the Children of Good Christians. Our Children should be taught how to address their Superiors with Modesty, their Inferiors with Gentleness, their Equals with Decency, and Inoffensiveness. . . . Unmannerly Children are but a Reproach, to their Feeders and Proclaim that they are better Fed than Taught.\(^{30}\)
\end{quote}

Under the patriarchal form of family government which prevailed in early American society, administrative duties weighed heavily on parents—particularly on the father. Paternal authority, reinforced by an abundance of Scriptural quotations, disciplined the junior

\(^{28}\) \textit{Ibid.}\n\(^{29}\) \textit{American Tract Society, A New Picture Book} (New York, c. 1831), 13.\n\(^{30}\) \textit{Anon., Cares about the Nurserie} (Boston, 1702), 11.
members of the family with inflexible severity, and made a great issue of prompt, unquestioning obedience. Since it was usually a foregone conclusion that boys and girls should "mind," and since ignorance of the law was no excuse for bad conduct, primers, spellers, and other juvenile books contained formal precepts of good manners which covered almost every phase of child life. In this age which believed that form was an integral part of the art of living, the depressingly negative code of "Don'ts" and "Musts" throws light on many interesting crannies of the circumscribed existence of youth.

Since the child's world was so largely dominated during the colonial era by religious considerations, good manners began with a rigid training in the proper decorum for the church or meeting house. The child was directed to "walk decently to thy Seat or Pew," and to give undivided attention to the sermon, "that thou mayest remember." Even after what doubtless seemed an interminable penitential exercise for the young Christian, he was warned not "to be hasty to run out when Worship is ended, as if thou wert weary of being there."  

Anthony Benezet compiled some of the rules of conduct used in the schools of Philadelphia for the "consideration of overseers and tutors, and requested that the master require strict obedience to them." In his attendance at the places of worship, the child was told to "be present at the times appointed, entering the place soberly, so as not to disturb the meditations of those that are met: Sit in a decent composure of body and mind, putting up your petitions to your heavenly Father, with an humble reverend disposition. When worship is over, rise not up in a hurry, not be impatient to be gone, but respectfully pass along without pressing, and return decently home."  

At home the little one was still expected to be a starched model of "good breeding," and to display an "awful respect" for his elders and betters. Accordingly, he was not to sit in the presence of his parents without bidding, "tho' no Strangers be present." He was told to treat his brothers and sisters with affection, and in like manner to behave to the "meanest servant; with kindness, using the

31 Anon., The A B C with the Church of England Catechism. Used at the Academy of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Philadelphia (Philadelphia, 1785), 15.
word ‘please’ where proper.” It was not expected, however, that children should “join in the idle talk or jesting of the servants, but choose the company of persons whose conversation is most improving in the best things.” 33

The system of elementary education successfully transferred from England to the American colonies was carried on in schools of various types, including the church-controlled academies, the tutorial method of instruction, private dame schools, and charity schools. In all of these practically the same curriculum, methods, and textbooks were used to supply the young with their “scholastical, theoretical, and moral discipline.” Utilitarian training in “the three R’s” was given as a matter of course. Thus Surveyor Thomas Holme, in his True Relation of the Flourishing State of Philadelphia, wrote in 1696 of the schools of that section:

Here are schools of divers sorts,
To which our youth daily resorts,
Good women, who do very well
Bring little ones to read and spell,
Which fits them for their writing; and then
Here’s men to bring them to their pen,
And to instruct and make them quick
In all sorts of arithmetic. 34

Tiny children learned the principles of reading from the hornbook, a small thin piece of wood closely resembling a paddle upon which a sheet of paper was placed containing the alphabet in large and small letters, some simple syllables such as ca, ci, co, cu, etc., and the Lord’s Prayer. This page was covered with a sheet of horn, and both paper and horn were fastened to the wood by narrow strips of metal held by tiny hand-wrought nails. At the two upper corners were crosses; hence a recitation from this device was commonly called “reading the crisscross row.” As the hornbook usually had a perforated handle, it could be conveniently carried in the child’s hand by a string, hung at his side, or worn about his neck. The teacher in the dame school or the mother in the home ordinarily pointed to the letters with a quill or knitting needle while the “infant scholars” read them aloud; or the teacher heard the older pupils shout in a lusty chorus their a-b abs, spell out the prayer, and recite the criss-

33 Ibid.
34 As quoted in Lillian Rhodes, The Story of Philadelphia (New York, 1900), 69.
cross row. As the need arose, this simple text which so closely resembled a paddle could also be used in that capacity to stimulate lagging spirits.\textsuperscript{35}

For more than a century, American boys and girls turned invariably from the hornbook or its cardboard cousin, the battledore, to such texts as \textit{The Royal Primer}, or to some variation of the New England Primer. Even German publications in the Middle states seem to have been influenced by the latter classic, as may be seen in such a work as \textit{Das Neue Deutsche A B C und Buchstabir}. Its similarity to the “Little Bible of New England” can be seen in such couplets as:

\begin{verbatim}
Nach Adams Falle
Wir sünd’gen alle. . . .\textsuperscript{36}
\end{verbatim}

In the first half of the eighteenth century, these books were all deeply religious in tone and comprehensive in content. Among other items, \textit{The Royal Primer} contained the alphabet in hornbook style, a syllabary, rules for decent conduct, selections from Watts’s \textit{Divine Hymns}, and the \textit{Shorter Catechism}. Its solemnity was slightly relieved by interesting cuts of birds, animals, and ships of various kinds accompanied by descriptive couplets like the following:

\begin{verbatim}
The Cuckow tells a merry Tale,
Upon the Hill and in the Vale.\textsuperscript{37}
\end{verbatim}

Another book used by boys and girls in the Quaker schools from the beginning of the century, was George Fox’s \textit{Instructions for Right-Spelling and Plain Directions for Reading and Writing True English}. Among the quaint items included in this work was a long selection devoted to the “signification of the Proper Names in Scripture,” and another on the “weights, measures, and coyns” mentioned in the Bible. The spelling words were not given in lists but underscored in sentences like this: “Jezebel was a bad Woman who killed the Just, and turned against the Lord’s Prophets with her attired Head and painted Face peeping out of the Window.” The reader may get an idea of the pronunciation of the times from the section on homonyms which contains such bits as: “Ask the Car-

\textsuperscript{35} Andrew W. Tuer, \textit{The History of the Hornbook}, 2 vols. (New York, 1924), I, 118.
\textsuperscript{36} Matthias Bartgis, \textit{Das Neue Deutsche A B C und Buchstabir} (Fredericktown, 1795).
\textsuperscript{37} Anon., \textit{The Royal Primer Improved: Being an Easy and Pleasant Guide to the Art of Reading} (Philadelphia, 1753), 69.
penter for his Ax. A Parson or Priest, a third Person. For want of Victuals his Vitals were faint.”

Even these elementary procedures, to be sure, affected the training of only a small portion of colonial children, for the great majority were still poorly instructed and remained so as long as education continued to be an individual responsibility. Boys and girls in the rural districts or on the frontier had no access to schools of any type; but the discipline of life and work in the isolated home, shop, or farm bred a certain wisdom. During these years the responsibility for preparing the young to perform properly the duties of a useful career rested alike on the church, the home and the few schools. This three-fold system, in spite of its patent shortcomings, seems to have met better than is commonly supposed the needs of the turbulent times during which the new nation sprang to life. Boys were trained to be good farmers, mechanics, merchants, or professional men—each devoted to the mysteries of his calling. From their thorough religious instruction and from the emphasis laid on “decent behavior,” American boys apparently acquired not only definite ideas of their duties as heads and founders of families, but also a certain self-respect and lofty ideas of their civic duties. Although the education of girls was ordinarily confined to the very rudiments of learning, this scope of knowledge was widened by the training received in the management of the home as an almost self-contained economic unit. To the traditional round of household duties, girls' responsibilities included the care of children and the spinning and weaving of garments. The reactions of the men and women thus trained to the demands of war and to the problems of the early national period demonstrated that these simple educational procedures had attained some measure of success.

Elementary instruction of all sorts was supplemented, for a small number of more fortunate youngsters, by private, secondary academies. Here, against the same religious background as obtained in the lower schools, students were initiated into the mysteries of the classical languages and mathematics—the English “grammar school” curriculum inherited from the days of the Renaissance and the Reformation.

38 George Fox, Instruction for Right-Spelling and Plain Directions for Reading and Writing True English (Philadelphia, 1702), 11, 32.
Long before the Revolution, however, this whole tradition was challenged sharply. American education was bound to reflect the growing self-sufficiency of the Colonies, as well as the increasing secularism of the Age of the Enlightenment. From about the mid-eighteenth century, a number of colonial thinkers became dissatisfied with the narrow theological basis of instruction and with the older emphasis on the learned languages. They wished to broaden both elementary and secondary schools, so as to include a wider range of interests and a more practical training. This movement received its main impetus in America from the writings and labors of a remarkable group of educational leaders in Philadelphia, notably from Anthony Benezet, Benjamin Franklin, and Benjamin Rush. Toward the close of the century, their principles were beginning to be accepted by educators in other sections of the country.

It is important, in this connection, to recall briefly a few of the educational writings of the Founding Fathers, in order to trace this shift from a dogmatic to a practical secular point of view. The budding pragmatism of the eighteenth century may readily be noted in Benjamin Franklin's well-known plan for the proposed Philadelphia Academy. In determining the course of studies, Franklin contemplated an English school, but when several of the patrons demanded a system that would also offer a classical training, he compromised on a three-fold division of interests: mathematics, English, and the classics. This new type of school stressed the importance of teaching the English language, literature, and oratory, introduced courses in science, and was operated by a non-sectarian and self-perpetuating board of trustees. In this institution the trend was, as Franklin had dreamed, towards "those things that are likely to be most useful and most ornamental: Regard being had for the several Professions." Franklin justified the change of curriculum and expressed his distress at the general indifference to the teaching of the mother tongue when he wrote:

Who thinks it of use to study correctly that Language which he is to use every Day of his Life . . . ? Every one is suffered to form his own Stile by Chance; to imitate the first wretched model which falls in his Way . . . Few think their Children qualified for a Trade till they have been wipt at a Latin school for five or six years, to learn a little of that which they are obliged to forget . . .

Anthony Benezet shared Franklin's enthusiasm for the improvement of the civil as well as the religious education of American children. In his text, *The Pennsylvania Spelling Book*, Benezet not only lamented the crude methods of instruction applied in elementary schools, but also denounced the indifference of his neighbors to the training of their children:

When we cast our eyes over the country and consider the little attention and pains employed therein, . . . we must allow that what they mean by education is something else than to qualify their children to be useful and serviceable in life; and to fit them for eternal happiness.\(^{40}\)

Another contribution to a practical curriculum that would "qualify the children to be useful and serviceable" was made by Benjamin Franklin when he revised and reprinted a compendium compiled by the English author, George Fisher. Nothing shows more clearly the trend towards the secularization of juvenile reading and of the schools than does this useful volume. With the exception of a few indirect references to God, this work ignores religious topics, and confines itself to such interests as bookkeeping, the gauging of vessels, precedents of legal writing, medical advice, and even "instructions to young women how to pickle and preserve all kinds of fruits and flowers."\(^{41}\)

An illustration of how far the readers published at the close of the century had gone in laying aside the religious tone of earlier works and in secularizing children's lessons, may be found in *The Child's Instructor*, produced in 1793 by John Ely of Philadelphia. The practical and the moral have obviously replaced the older emphasis on the theological, in such excerpts as the following:

Here is Frank: he has just come home: he has been at school like a good boy: Frank must have some dinner: here is some soup for you. Soup will make little boys grow. Hold your plate: here is some meat: take your knife and fork and eat a little. Boys should not eat too much: if they eat too much they will be dull and drowsy, and will not learn. Now Frank you have done your dinner, sit here. After dinner sit a while; after supper walk a mile.\(^{42}\)

By 1835, readers were designed to please and amuse children as well as to instruct them. This was done by illustrating the lessons

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\(^{40}\) Anthony Benezet, *The Pennsylvania Spelling Book*.


with colored pictures, and by opening the door to the land of make-believe, through which boys and girls could wander into the world of their imaginations. This tendency reflected a dawning concern with a child's right to his own personality—which in turn was probably due both to increasing leisure and to the more worldly outlook which went with this. There was now time to allow a child some cultivation of his own interests; hence he no longer need be forced at once into adult molds. Boys must have thrilled to the gay pictures and sprightly rhymes of such works as *The Book of the Sea for the Instruction of Little Sailors*.

Like prisoned eagles sailors pine  
On the dull and quiet shore;  
They long for the flashing brine,  
The spray and the tempest roar.

To shoot through the sparkling foam,  
Like an ocean bird set free—  
Like the ocean bird their home  
They find on the ranging sea.43

In the textbooks provided for the children of the early national period, the first strivings after that perfection in education which had been envisioned by the Founding Fathers may be detected. New emphasis was given such studies as history, geography, and English grammar, as well as music and nature study. The fifty years following the Revolution were a period of transition and liberalization, during which the growing interest in the personality of the child manifested itself in this broadened curriculum as well as in the attempts noted to humanize the text books and the juvenile literature as a whole.

Superimposed on these trends, moreover, was an effort to spread the advantages of the new education throughout the entire population. The equalitarian enthusiasms aroused by the Revolution and by the later "Jacksonian democracy" had obvious educational implications. The civil authorities of a democracy must see that all children were trained for citizenship. To reach the goal of mass education in the training of citizens, many obstacles had to be overcome. Class distinctions were alike a barrier to rich and poor—the one scorned contact with inferiors, the other feared the stamp of

pauperism. Sectarian interests jealously guarded their rights to teach and preserve in private schools the doctrines of a particular faith. Many considered the state control of education as an invasion of family rights; a few others believed that the education of the masses would fill society with dangerous radicals. On the other hand, new factors after 1825 were stimulating an interest in universal education. A whole complex of forces associated with vaguely defined but potent concepts of "progress" and "civilization" were combining to focus public attention on the need of a free public school system. As is well known, the Middle Atlantic states—like others in the North—established such systems on the elementary level during the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

No survey of the changing status of children would be complete without some consideration of such vital matters as their health and general well-being. At best living conditions in eighteenth-century America were primitive; juvenile health was as a rule endangered in winter by exposure to cold in drafty homes, and in summer not only by the lack of protection against insects but by the drinking water which was usually obtained from surface wells and hence subject to pollution. The ordinary source of illumination was candles, and on rare occasions sperm or lard oil lamps—a lighting system undoubtedly responsible for much damage to the eyesight of the young. Other health hazards were universal, for even the largest towns did not provide sanitary services. As a result, offensive heaps of ashes and garbage dotted the alleys and vacant lots, through which hogs were permitted to roam to act as scavengers by eating up the scraps thrown out by housewives. In the large families the older members were so busily engaged in eking out an existence that children were not only neglected and denied the simple hygienic care advocated in the late seventeen hundreds, but were frequently forced to share the hard, rough work. Although the argument has been made that the fresh air, sunshine, and plain, wholesome food enjoyed by children in the rural districts were compensating advantages, these gains seem to have been offset by ignorance and the hardships of the life.

Most aspects of the hygienic care of colonial children were intimately connected with religious beliefs and practices. Pains and ills were accepted not only as a means of spiritual purification and
merit, but also as a source of disciplining the young, for it was believed that suffering taught them to avoid certain dangers as well as to be provident, humane, and courageous. An old textbook published in 1720 counseled the child not to place too much confidence either in his parents' care or in the medical skill of physicians: "If it please God, Physick shall do a Man good; but if God withhold his Blessing, all Endeavours are vain: For God makes use of Physicians as his Instruments, and therefore it best agreeth with Religion to join Prayer with Physick." In this age, health and sickness, like many other problems of child life, were left largely in the hands of God to be resolved as He saw fit.

It was the prevalence of diseases fatal to children—influenza, malaria, scarlet fever, and diphtheria or "malignant sore throat"—that led Benjamin Franklin in 1748 to revise a textbook with the following comment: "In the British Edition of the Book, there were many things of little or no Use in these parts of the World: in this Edition those things are omitted, and in their Room many other Matters inserted, more immediately useful to us Americans." Among the "useful things" was a treatise entitled: "Every Man His Own Doctor: or the Poor Planter's Physician: Wrote by a Gentleman of Virginia." As frankly stated, the object of this work was "to lead the poorer Sort into the pleasant Paths of Health; and when they have the Misfortune to be sick, to shew them the cheapest and easiest Ways of getting well again."

While bewailing the "melancholy truth" that so many children perished for want of timely care, the author reveals the current distrust of medical aid: "One Mischief is, most of our inhabitants have such an unreasonable aversion to Physick, (even when they have it from their charitable Neighbours for nothing) that they neglect to take any; till their case grows desperate, and Death begins to glare them in the Face." It was this "unhappy temper" on the part of wary adults that was blamed for the great mortality which "fell heaviest on the Younger Sort" who were most susceptible to "hurrying distempers." But the author admits extenuating circumstances for certain cautious parents, some of whom he thinks would

45 George Fisher (pseud.), *The American Instructor: or the Young Man's Best Companion.* Revised and corrected by B. Franklin and D. Hall (Philadelphia, 1748), Preface.
have been glad of professional medical assistance for their families if they did not believe that the "Remedy was almost as bad as the Disease." Since doctors' fees were considered exorbitant "whether they killed or cured," many parents preferred to trust the sick child's constitution rather than to beggar their whole family. The Virginia gentleman went on to claim that he did not "cram his patients with much physic," neither did he ransack the universe for outlandish drugs which would waste and decay on a long voyage; but he was contented "to do all his execution with the weapons of our own country." Among the ingredients used in the preparation of his nostrums he listed such simples as: bears-oyl, garlic, tobacco, wormwood, and whey.\textsuperscript{46}

These were indeed mild substances in comparison with the traditional prescriptions recommended in an English work of 1742 which was used in colonial practice. In one instance, the latter declared that a child suffering from epilepsy had been cured by powders including "Earth worms prepared one Ounce" and "human Skull prepared two Drams." The reader is informed that the child so "loathed such a great quantity of nauseous powder" that she was allowed to take a little nutmeg after each dose. When the fits discontinued, she had to take the powders only "three days before every New and Full Moon." (Here was the traditional astrological element, which retained its influence in medical practice throughout the seventeenth century.) The reader will be relieved to learn, incidentally, that after this heroic treatment, the youngster was entirely cured of her "dismal distemper."\textsuperscript{47}

For such ailments as a cough, the child was told to drink "brandy treacle and sallad oil" when he went to bed; or to take a mixture of butter and brown sugar. When a child "fell into" a more serious "distemper," a sort of slow torment seemed to be the traditional procedure. In the case of quinsy, a common complaint of childhood, the procedure was to "bleed immediately ten ounces, rather in the jugular vein than in the arm"; to apply a blister to the neck, and if the inflammation continued, to bleed again the next day. The following morning the child was to take a purge of the "decoction of mallows"

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 344f, 369f.
\textsuperscript{47} Walter Harris, \textit{A Treatise on the Acute Diseases of Infants}, translated from the Latin by John Martyn (London, 1742), 153ff.
and syrup of peach blossoms; while from the beginning he was to
gargle with Dr. Papa's Liquor, and to drink a half pint of the same
"night and morning." To prevent these throat complaints and their
tortuous treatments, the child was told to wash his neck and behind
his ears every morning in cold water, and not to "muffle himself up
too warm, either night or day." 48

A word might be added, in explanation of the foregoing, of the
state of medical science in the colonial era. Although pediatrics as a
science was an unknown factor in colonial life, a certain amount of
medical attention was necessarily given the young and this care re-
lected, as did so many other phases of childhood, both the influences
of the European cultural heritage and that of the New World envi-
ronment. Few Americans of the colonial period were able to secure a
university training in medicine. Only a small number of the upper
class who desired to learn "physic" were able to receive the instruc-
tion given by the best medical authorities at London, Edinburgh,
or Leyden. The majority of potential physicians apprenticed them-

48 Ibid., 347, 348.
There are still those who feel that a drug, to be effective, must be drastic.

By the turn of the nineteenth century, however, medical science became more critical, and the influence of a child welfare movement inaugurated in Europe several decades previously began to be felt in America. During the first half of the nineteenth century, moreover, early aspirations for sanitary reform reached this country from abroad, and were also inspired by native experience with epidemic diseases. Rising standards of living meanwhile helped to promote healthier conditions in the homes.

As a result of all these developments, children born during the second quarter of the century may have had a somewhat better chance of survival than had earlier generations. In the more progressive cities, streets were paved and cleaned, and public water systems installed. And in the homes of the better educated classes, in both town and country, more attention was paid to child health. Children were given a cold morning bath, and were scrubbed with soap and warm water in a vigorous ritual on Saturday nights. Beer and heavy fried foods eventually disappeared from their diet, to be supplanted by such simple fare as porridge, cocoa, eggs, and toast thinly spread with butter and jam. Even though the training given nurses at this time was still elemental and unsatisfactory, when sickness did appear, regular doctors were summoned with greater confidence than formerly. To follow this improvement in child care even casually, as it is revealed in juvenile books, is to trace a gratifying evolution in American child life.

It must be remembered, to begin with, that proper eating habits had not been established as late as 1835. In the more sophisticated cities of the Middle area, children were customarily seated at the breakfast table with their parents and allowed a stimulating and indigestible meal of hot coffee, dried salted fish, or sausages with hot bread or buckwheat cakes. As a sequel to this breakfast, the children's digestive organs at noon were in no condition to dispose of a substantial luncheon; consequently, during the afternoon their hunger was satisfied by unlimited quantities of bread and butter. At


50 Dr. G. Ackerley, On the Management of Children in Sickness and in Health, second edition (New York, 1836), 59, 60.
the evening meal the little ones were further deprived of sufficient
nourishment by having set before them generous supplies of "sweet-
meats" and rich cakes.

To underscore the need of a correct diet for children, members of
the medical profession gave directions for avoiding the disagreeable
skin diseases so common among the young at that time; stressed the
need of exercise in the open air to stimulate poor appetites; and
pointed out as an advantage of a balanced diet that children's teeth
"would not be set to ache by every slight exposure to the change of
temperature the climate is so peculiarly subject to." Only infre-
quent references were made to vegetables as a part of children's diet,
even when they might accompany the "vehicle" of meat and bread
in the principal meal. Most works insisted that little ones eat "a
great deal of bread," a few also directed the young to "blend their
meat with greens, turnips, or other garden stuff," although they
warned that pickles and all "high sauce" should not be touched by
boys and girls. Fruits were given at best only a half-hearted ap-
proval; for as late as 1835, a Philadelphia doctor wrote on this head:
"It is an error to suppose, that fruit is positively useful, as a nourish-
ment or as a medicine, to young children." In regard to the quantities of milk consumed daily by city children
there is an interesting account of the early method of supplying this
necessity. The Cries of New York informed its little reader that milk
was delivered from door to door twice a day in summer and once in
winter. A man carrying two large kettles from a yoke on his shoulders
trudged through the streets and called out to his customers: "Here's
the Milk, Ho!" Those farmers who kept cows on the outskirts of the
city drove around with carts, "which were mostly covered," and sold
the milk at from six to ten cents a quart. Thus New Yorkers took
the first step in following the well-known maxim: "Give children
plenty of milk, plenty of sleep, and plenty of flannel."

Robertson's Observations on the Mortality and Physical Manage-
ment of Children also gave a quaint account of the sanitary measures

51 Ibid.
53 Anon., The Cries of New York (New York, 1814), 41.
in force at this time by explaining to children the office of the "Bell-Man":

This man on his cart as he drives along,
His bell doth swing ding, dong, ding, dong.

When the warm season commences, as one means for the preservation of health, the citizens are not allowed to throw into the streets the offal of any animal, husks of corn, pea-pods, or any kind of garbage, dead rats, cats, or shells, but the servants have them ready in baskets or pails, and when they hear this man's bell turn out, and empty them into his cart. Such part as is fit for hogs or cows to eat he preserves and discharges the rest off the end of the dock into the river.55

In the first decade of the last century several juvenile books on the novel subjects of health and safety were published in Philadelphia. Among the first was William Darton's Chapter of Accidents and Remarkable Events: Containing Caution and Instruction for Children, which had been pirated and printed from its English edition by Jacob Johnson. In its revised form Johnson localized some of the stories and included such delightful bits as: "Cautions to Walkers in the Streets of Philadelphia." Young pedestrians on Market Street were warned never to "turn hastily round the corner of the street, by this some have been greatly hurt. One young woman in so doing, ran against a porter's load, and nearly lost one of her eyes by the blow she received." The child was also told to avoid "as much as may be" any crowds that assembled in the streets; yet when accidents occurred, he was to assist the afflicted, if practicable; and when not so he was to retire. Only the resident natives seem to have been considered entirely dependable for honesty and courtesy, for strangers were warned to inquire at "houses or shopkeepers for any place they want to find, and not of persons in the street, lest they be deliberately misdirected." 56

Another book relating to juvenile safety, The Post Boy, was thoroughly American in its content, and employed the "horrible example" technique to underscore some rather harrowing lessons. One of the "Packets" in a selection entitled "The Post Boy's Bag Opened" contained the following terse account:

Packet 3. Two little boys lost their lives in a pond! They went in to bathe, and did not know how deep the water was. They asked to take a walk in the field, and as it was a hot day, they went into the water. They were both put into one grave.57

55 The Cries of New York, 28.
56 William Darton, Chapter of Accidents (Philadelphia, 1807), pages unnumbered.
57 Anon., The Post Boy (Philadelphia, c. 1807), pages unnumbered.
Children who lived within the shadow of Independence Hall and within sound of the Liberty Bell naturally wished to celebrate their national holiday on the Fourth of July with a certain amount of enthusiasm. Their elders, however, laid restraining hands on the young patriots who commemorated the day with firecrackers. To the detriment of juvenile gayety, it is feared, grownups voiced the opinion that “playing with gunpowder” was the most dangerous of all sports, and published another little safety guide with the following pronouncement:

Boys are very fond of letting off squibs and crackers, but many have severely repented the consequences of this amusement . . . How many accidents have happened on rejoicing days, particularly on the 4th of July! As we commemorate the escape from the dreadful effects of gunpowder, it is rather absurd that it should on that day be made the principal agent for amusement. 58

Medical treatments, as well as hygiene and safety precautions, were being improved as the nineteenth century advanced. An instance of the change in the latter phase of child care between 1700 and 1833 may be noted in the conflicting opinions on the merits of the cold bath as a remedy for rickets. In the earlier period, the mother was advised to “dip the child in the morning, head foremost in Cold Water, don’t dress it immediately, but let it be made warm in the Cradle & sweat at least half an Hour moderately.” 59 In 1833, John Eberle, a Philadelphia physician, denounced this cold water treatment either as a cure for rickets or to harden the constitution. He remarked that the practice might “possibly suit the Greenlanders, but is not adapted to this country,” and that it was a doubtful and dangerous experiment wholly uncalled for by the real wants of the child’s nature. 60

From this brief examination of the records of child care, some impression may be received of the risks that beset the young, and also of the attempts made after 1800 to remedy the situation. Both the dangers facing children and the growing concern displayed by physicians about the whole matter, were well summed up by Dr.

58 Anon., Little Prattle Over a Book of Prints (Philadelphia, 1808), pages unnumbered.
William Dewees, Professor of Midwifery at the University of Pennsylvania, who declared in 1835:

It is our firm conviction, that the mortality among children is unnecessarily great; and that this excess originates, in the mal-administration of the means of life, rather than in the operation of natural and inevitable causes. Some are nursed to death, while many others die because they are not nursed at all; some are fed to death, while others die from inanition; some are physicked to death, while others die from the want of a single dose of it—all of which goes to prove how much experience and judgment are required to administer with success, to the wants and infirmities of children.61

Last but not least among the aspects of child life which merit consideration, is the matter of recreation. Today we assume that this is a natural preoccupation of all youngsters, but this attitude did not always prevail. One sentence in the child’s book of good manners epitomized the adult attitude towards play in colonial days—“Let thy Recreation be Lawful, Brief, and Seldom.” This censorious toleration of amusement for the young was conditioned to some extent by the poverty, the incessant labors, the dangers and privations that weighed on the minds and bodies of the older and more responsible members of early American society. Not only was play generally considered a foolish and sinful waste of precious time but the very desire for recreation was deemed another evidence of the child’s “corrupt nature.” This stern disapproval of an “inordinate love of play” kept a tenacious hold on the American mind; for as late as 1814, a little book published in New York, entitled The Seasons, bore this warning to young and old:

Unless care and labor are taken to keep down the evil propensities of little children to anger, idleness, and to too much play, they will grow in evil habits; and instead of being useful members of society, they will be pests and burdens: will drag out an unprofitable existence here, and must expect in the coming world, that their lot will be among the miserable.62

Since, in general, a love of play was considered by the colonial conscience as a moral weakness, many adults seemed to have regarded it as a passing defect of character that children would eventually outgrow or lose with their milk teeth. In the meantime, however, until the seriousness of life could be fully appreciated, the

61 Dewees, op. cit., 145.
62 Anon., The Seasons (New York, 1814), 21. Italics are mine.
follies of youth and their desire for pleasure must be tolerated or suppressed as opportunity warranted.

By the turn of the nineteenth century this disparaging attitude had changed to some degree. More secure economic conditions provided richer opportunities for Americans to relax a little; the strict principles of puritanism had been somewhat mitigated; and the romanticism of the age had raised the child as a distinct personality to a position of importance in the family. With this change in adult thinking came a shift in the popular regard for the child, expressed in this case by a desire to permit him a limited amount of recreation. Instead of seeing in the ordinary youthful inclination to play a "snare of the Old Deluder, Satan," many grownups now appreciated the social advantages of "rational and useful sports." It was a recognized fact that the chief function of play was to invigorate the bodily powers for a more successful discharge of duty; and that the constitution of the child's mind was such that it could not bear to be intensely employed at a given occupation for a long time without interruption. Hence it was on the basis of the adult desire to derive from the little men and women the greatest amount of usefulness that amusements became an integral part of child life.

Among the more enlightened parents of the last century there were some who recognized in play a natural outlet for the abundant energies of childhood. To harness this energy, as well as to point the moral of charity, these adults fostered in the little ones a desire to help others, on the theory that even the very young were supposed to be happy as long as they thought themselves useful. In the name of peaceful pleasure boys and girls were sent with baskets on their arms to pick peas for dinner, to weed the garden, or to feed the chickens; although constant supervision was needed to prevent such disasters as their pulling up flowers as well as weeds. In the house, too, a variety of small tasks was found to "amuse children innocently." To avoid habits of listlessness, little girls dusted chairs and wiped spoons, while their brothers carried firewood and water or ran errands. After these useful pursuits had been accomplished, the skill of the girls might be turned to such "ornamental work" as knitting, weaving bobbin, making watch guards and chains, and to all kinds of sewing. In almost every family the girls had a "stint" of sewing to do daily. Some made a sampler by cross-stitching the alphabet large
and small, the figures up to ten, and their names and ages in bright colored wools or silks on canvas; others made slippers or bags of twine for carrying their luncheons and other school properties.\footnote{Lydia H. Sigourney, \textit{Letters to Mothers} (New York, 1829), 246, 247.}

That such stints were not always classified as play by the little maids can be inferred from the very frank inscription made on a sampler by Patty Polk of Maryland in 1800. Patty left a permanent record of her mutiny when she daringly cross-stitched the words: "Patty Polk did this and she hated every stitch she did in it. She loves to read much more."\footnote{Ethel S. Bolton and Eva J. Coe, \textit{American Samplers} (Boston, 1921), 96.} Perhaps to atone for this unladylike outburst, the child patriotically embroidered on a white tomb the initials G. W. in honor of the Father of her Country, and encircled the whole with garlands of forget-me-nots.

Most of the active games played by early American children were a part of their English heritage and were accompanied by rhymed formulas such as "London bridge is falling down," which were in turn handed down by some mysterious process from one generation to another. In this transmission of the rules and rhymes for juvenile play, the printed word had little part until the end of the eighteenth century. Since the tradition was oral for so many decades, the rhymes sung by American children invariably differed from the form of the same game used in Great Britain. This stock in trade of youth went back to medieval England—to the days before religious distinctions existed. As a result, the old games were accepted alike by Puritans, Quakers, and Anglicans as a part of British culture.\footnote{Sister Monica Kiefer, O. P., "A History of the Changing Status of the American Child in the Colonial and Early National Periods As Revealed in Juvenile Literature," (MS. to be published by the University of Pennsylvania Press, 1944), 385, 386.}

Although colonial adults usually did not raise serious objections to the form of the games played by their children, they did begrudge boys and girls the time spent in such amusements. This distinction must be kept in mind if one is to understand the efforts made by grownups to utilize the child's inclination to perpetual motion by establishing a routine of "studies and stints in due season," with no definite provisions for play time. The volume of works on children's games and sports produced in the Middle states, and particularly in the Philadelphia area, however, suggests that active play was either more in keeping with the tastes of this section or that the publishers
of this locality were more interested in supplying children’s recrea-
tional needs. Whatever the cause, more than three times as many
works on juvenile sports were published in the central region than
in New England, where amusements of a more quiet nature were
supplied by publishers. Of the hundreds of volumes on juvenile
recreations which were popular in the Middle area, *Children’s
Amusements* made a typical concession to games and toys as part
of the child’s equipment for life, but with definite reservations:

They can employ themselves indoors with their tops to unbend the mind from
their studies, when the storm howling without forbids their chasing the hoop, or
tossing the ball; and in clear cold winter mornings, driving the whip-top has a good
effect to exercise the arms and body, and of giving a free circulation to the blood.
We would here remind our little readers, that although we recommend divers kinds
of plays, as rational, innocent, etc., yet we would wish to be understood that we
are far, very far, from being willing to encourage more of any kind, than simply
and alone to unbend the mind, invigorate the body, that they may again return to
their studies or other useful employments with fresh energy and vigor.66

In another little book, *Remarks on Children’s Play*, forty-two
games were described, of which all but three were for boys; while
eight others—swinging, bathing, jumping rope, hunting the slipper,
riding on hands, threading the needle, tossing balls, and shuttlecock
—were recommended either for boys or girls as “profitable and suit-
able to occupy the reasonable time allowed as a respite from the
needle or study.” In the accounts of the three pastimes reserved for
girls—dressing dolls, blowing soap bubbles, and cup and ball—the
description of the last game not only indicates the contemporary
attitude towards the “female sex,” but sets the proper bounds for
feminine amusements. The game, cup and ball, is characterized as a
“trifling diversion . . . fit only for girls to amuse themselves with.
It requires a steady hand and a nice eye for the player to be expert
in catching the ball in the point of the ivory handle.”67 It was in
this same spirit that older girls were told to find amusement not only
in various kinds of reading, but by the study of natural science—
especially “by arranging flowers, by walking abroad in solitude, or
by useful and cheerful conversation with their friends.”68

To determine who was to be “It” in the active games, an amazing
variety of counting-out rhymes were used by children in the different

66 Anon., *Children’s Amusements* (New York, 1822), 15.
parts of the country. Usually a child told off one word of a rhyme for every player, tapping each in turn, and the one on whom the last word of the verse fell was “out.” Often each one of a small group put his finger on the brim of an inverted hat that the leader might tell off the words on the fingers. This rite, by either method, was repeated until only one player was left and he was obliged to lead the game. Most of these rhymes—whatever their ultimate origins—made no sense and were mere jargons of unmeaning sounds with rhythm the predominating factor. The Philadelphia version of a curious old Gipsy method of counting from one to ten went as follows:

Eny, meny, mony, mite,
Butter, lather, bony, strike,
Hair cut, froth neck,
Halico, balico,
We, wo, wack.69

Among the amusements for older children, dancing was always a favorite; girls and boys of the towns and villages assembled at every opportunity to “trip merrily to the sound of music.” Many of the dances they used reflected by their names the historical background of the period; for instance, in the Choice Collection of New and Approved Country Dances, of 1796, there were directions to young Americans for dancing The Democratic Rage, The President, De La Bastille, and Genet’s Recall.70 Dancing masters taught little boys and girls their steps as a part of their elementary training; for this complicated art was apparently regarded by most folk in the Middle states as not only a pleasant accomplishment but as a solemn obligation in good society. The records show that when a Philadelphia girl forgot her turn in a country dance by talking for a moment to a friend, the master of ceremonies rushed to her crying: “Give over, Miss. Take care what you are about. Do you think you came here for your pleasure?”71

Although early American children played a variety of games, they did not have a corresponding assortment of toys. Heading the list of imported orthodox playthings were dolls of all sorts, from small,

70 Anon., A Collection of New and Approved Country Dances (Northampton, 1796), 1-16.
71 Alice M. Earle, Child Life in Colonial Days (New York, 1924), 110, 111.
jointed wooden figures to elaborate creations with a kid body, china head, and clothes similar to those of the adults of the time. Since these puppets had to be sheltered, there were also intriguing "baby houses" fully equipped with tiny furniture, pictures, and cooking utensils. Various kinds of military toys had their age-old appeal; toy bows and arrows were used in spite of the warnings given in little books, and popguns with clay pellets and slings were popular with boys if not with their elders. Small warriors armed with wooden swords stepped to martial music provided by cow-horn trumpets or by real drums. Battalions of dashing tin soldiers painted or dressed in gay uniforms were reviewed by delighted little boys.72

Most American children, to be sure, never even saw these treasures, since the poverty of their parents or their remoteness from toy shops prevented such purchases. As a rule, those thus denied the imported toys cleverly supplied their play needs by articles of their own manufacture. There are accounts of little country girls whose genius fashioned cows of fir cones, tiny chairs, sofas, and cradles of prickly burs, as well as cups and saucers of acorns. These little maids could also make dolls of small sticks—without arms, legs or features—but gorgeously apparelled in hollyhock skirts and petunia bonnets. In the fantastic world of make-believe, such dolls could readily be left to sleep beneath mullein-blankets or plantain coverlets while the young mothers were engaged in the serious business of play.

For their needs, meanwhile, little boys made kites and reed fifes, pegged together carts from bits of wood, or whittled simple toys for themselves and others. Very small lads could gallop miles on broomstick horses; while those a little older expertly managed a rocking horse fashioned from a long-necked squash that had been bridled and placed on four sticks. There are also records of numerous sham battles fought by small soldiers armed with wooden swords and reed popguns; other boys of a more peaceful nature fastened smooth bones to their shoes for ice skates, or coursed down the hills on homemade sleds.

It is safe to assume that the majority of American children lost nothing in creating their own playthings, but that this practice in filling a need made them more resourceful in later life. Since fineness

of form is of small importance to the young, the absurd toys they
designed doubtless answered perfectly their rapidly changing recrea-
tional requirements. In concurrence with the play instinct which
resents relics of its recent past, the girl's flower-dressed doll and the
boy's squash horse conveniently fell to pieces and disappeared almost
as soon as they had fulfilled their mission. But this mission, we
would now feel, was a significant one. Such were the capacities of
youthful imaginations and the impetus given to creative genius in
the course of play, that early American boys and girls could dream
of greatness and lay the groundwork for that progress in the arts and
sciences effected by succeeding generations.

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