



THE HORATIO ALGER SOCIETY

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION

NEWSBOY



Horatio Alger, Jr.

1832 – 1899

A magazine devoted to the study of Horatio Alger, Jr., his life, works, and influence on the culture of America.

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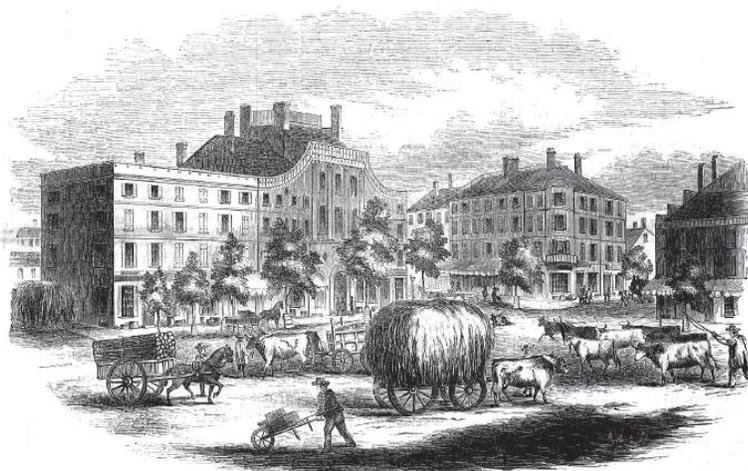
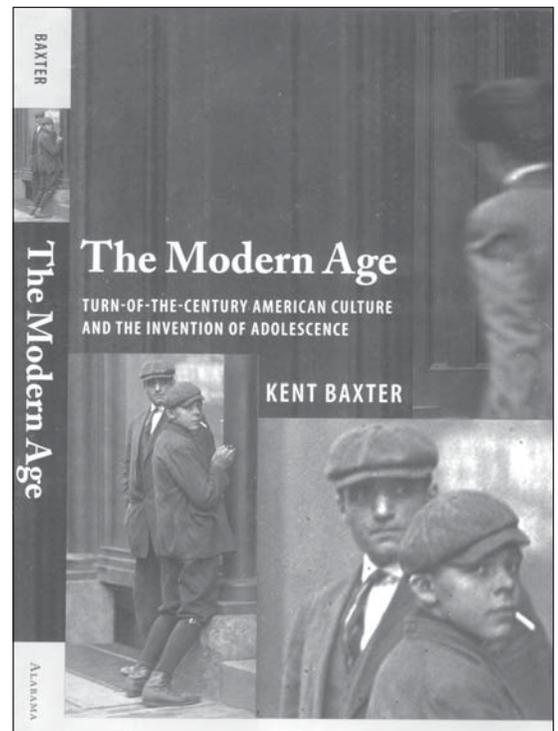
MARCH-APRIL 2010

NUMBER 2

The Modern Age

Teen Reading at the Turn of the Century: Horatio Alger

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Market Square, Portsmouth, New Hampshire — 1853

Welcome to Portsmouth!

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President's column

Spring is here ... I think! A couple of weeks ago we had the hottest weather for the month of March in recorded history. As I sit at my desk writing this column, I am reminded of this evening's weather report ... Frost is expected! I do not mind the cold, I just wish the weather would make up its mind. Waffling and indecision are minor pet peeves that I struggle to overlook even in the weather. The weather has two weeks to make up its mind and turn warm and sunny for the 2010 Horatio Alger Society Convention in Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

I have long pondered whether I am a reader of books first and a collector of books second or vice versa. As a child, I was a voracious reader, plowing through books owned by my mother, father, grandparents, along with the books that I bought with my money. The reading of books was my primary focus; however, I could not bear to part with any of them and if I enjoyed one owned by someone else, I had this innate need to find my own copy. Today, I have many books that I have yet to read. I intend to read them, but as a collector of specific genres and authors, I buy more books than I have time to read and I buy them based not on my needs as a reader, but my needs as a collector. That said, I also buy books for the sole purpose of reading.

I recently bought a book, *Ironfire* by David Ball, from the clearance section at a local used bookstore. It was a fine condition, first edition in jacket, but I bought it solely to read. *Ironfire* is a modern historical fiction book about the clash between the Muslim Ottoman empire and the Christian world. This clash of worlds culminated in the Siege of Malta in 1565. I highly recommend this book!

Reading this book started me down a rabbit hole. I located and read another historical fiction book regarding the Siege of Malta, *Blood Rock* by James Jackson. It was good, but not as good as *Ironfire*. I then purchased *Constantinople: The Last Great Siege* and *Empires of the Sea* by Roger Crowley, followed by *The Great Siege: Malta 1565* by Ernle Bradford. These non-fiction books added much to my knowledge of the history regarding the religious battles still being waged today.

I used the previous example to illustrate the question I have been asking myself. I bought *Ironfire* to read; it

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HORATIO ALGER SOCIETY

To further the philosophy of Horatio Alger, Jr. and to encourage the spirit of *Strive & Succeed* that for half a century guided Alger's undaunted heroes. Our members conduct research and provide scholarship on the life of Horatio Alger, Jr., his works and influence on the culture of America. The Horatio Alger Society embraces collectors and enthusiasts of all juvenile literature, including boys' and girls' series, pulps and dime novels.

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Membership applications, renewals, changes of address and other correspondence should be sent to **Horatio Alger Society, P.O. Box 70361, Richmond, VA 23255**.

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Newsboy ad rates: Full page, \$32.00; one-half page, \$17.00; one-quarter page, \$9.00; per column inch (1 inch deep by approx. 3 1/2 inches wide), \$2.00. Send ads, with check payable to Horatio Alger Society, P.O. Box 70361, Richmond, VA 23255.

The above rates apply to all want ads, along with ads offering non-Alger books for sale. However, it is the policy of the Horatio Alger Society to promote the exchange of Alger books and related Alger materials by providing space **free of charge** to our members for the **sale only** of such material. Send ads or "Letters to the Editor" to **Newsboy** editor William R. Gowen (PF-706) at 23726 N. Overhill Dr., Lake Zurich, IL 60047. E-mail: hasnewsboy@aol.com

Former H.A.S. President Jim Ryberg dies

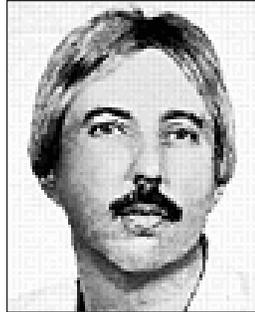
Just as this issue of *Newsboy* was in final preparation, we learned of the death of life member and former Horatio Alger Society President Jim Ryberg (PF-533) in Houston, Texas, on Feb. 10 at age 65.

Donald James Ryberg was born on Sept. 10, 1944, and he joined the Society in 1978, hosting the 1986 convention, "Horatio's in Houston." Ryberg was elected President during that convention, succeeding Eugene Hafner (PF-175), and he served until May 1988.

Ryberg, formerly a resident of Bloomington, Illinois, before moving to Houston, was a retiree of the Houston Independent School District, where he taught high school English. A longtime book collector, he officially became a dealer in 1985 when he took ownership of The Out of Print Bookstore in Houston from its 1977 founder, Arvena Flury. Jim had worked as Ms. Flury's store manager and book buyer.

"Jim retired in 2003 and remained our consultant in fine acquisitions. His legacy and presence will always be with us," says current owner Ricardo Sweatt Rodriguez in a tribute posted on the store's official Web site. Rodriguez, one of Ryberg's former students, had been introduced to the rare books field by Ryberg in 1990 and eventually bought the business from him.

Ryberg knew very little about Horatio Alger when he joined the Society in 1978. He attended his first convention in 1982, "Philed in Philadelphia," hosted



D. James Ryberg

by William D. Russell (PF-549), and where the Horatio Alger commemorative stamp was introduced and had its official first day of issue.

In one of his early President's Columns, Ryberg described his initial feelings about joining the Society:

"The late Dick Seddon had convinced me that the Society was where I belonged, and I certainly enjoyed reading *Newsboy*. I continually wondered about the other members because at the time there were none in the Houston area. When I saw Bill Russell's convention was featuring the issuance of a Horatio Alger stamp, I knew I had to attend.

"So, in 1982, I walked into the hospitality room in Willow Grove, Pennsylvania, to see a half-empty potato chip bowl, bags of pretzels, and three wonderful people — Mary Ellen Thomas, Jean Hartmann, and Ruth Miller. They welcomed me and said the 'men-folk' were all out hunting books ... a tradition still very much in practice at all our conventions.

"By evening, everyone was back at the motel, and I was engaged in conversation with the experts who owned more volumes of Algers than (the twenty or so Donohues) that I had collected. I knew very little about Alger, the man, so I timidly approached *the* expert, Ralph D. Gardner, who generously answered the 'new guy's' questions. Bill Russell greeted me like a long-lost friend, and Jerry Friedland took me under his wing and nurtured a soon-to-be-serious Horatio Alger fan. Bob Sawyer and Paul Miller also spent much time with the novice and his many questions. These friendships still remain, and those people are still very special to me this day."

Portsmouth welcomes Horatio Alger Society

By William R. Gowen (PF-706)

The promotional hype is about over, and now it's time for Partic'lar Friends to start packing their luggage for "In a New Hampshire World," the Horatio Alger Society's 46th annual convention, on May 13-16.

The historic seaport city of Portsmouth has so many interesting places to visit, it's unlikely you'll be able to do everything you'd like in the free time our hosts, Pat and Art Young, have set aside from a typically busy schedule. Best suggestion: arrive a day early or remain

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The Joshua Wentworth House is one of 42 restored 17th-18th century buildings found in Strawbery Banke Museum on Portsmouth's historic waterfront. It's a good place to visit "In a New Hampshire World."

Editor's notebook

On Page 20 of this issue, Jim Towey's advertisement lists reprints of two rare early books by Howard R. Garis written under his own name. One is titled *The Island Boys*, published by R.F. Fenno & Company in 1912 The other is *The White Crystals*, published by Little, Brown of Boston in 1904. Both titles are of such scarcity that I recommend buying these reprints while they last.

John T. Dizer (PF-511) wrote an article for the November-December 1996 *Newsboy* titled "Other than Uncle Wiggily: The lesser-known works of Howard R. Garis." The article later became a chapter in Dizer's book *Tom Swift, the Bobbsey Twins and Other Heroes of American Juvenile Literature* (Edwin Mellen Press, 1997). In it, he describes *The White Crystals* as follows:

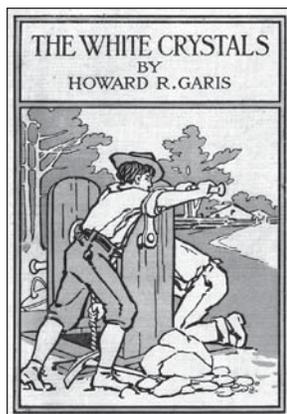
"The last of Garis' early books — books written before he started writing for the Stratemeyer Syndicate — was *The White Crystals, Being an Account of the Adventures of Two Boys*. It was published in 1904, the same year as *Isle of Black Fire* [Lippincott]. ...

"To me, *The White Crystals* seems a much better constructed book than *Isle of Black Fire*. It was about Cardiff, N.Y., an area Garis knew thoroughly. He even combined the names of his real Cardiff uncle and his Manlius grandfather for the name of the Cardiff uncle in the story. *The White Crystals* is the story of a city boy, Roger Anderson, who is about 15 years old and who has to go to the country for a year to regain his health. He goes to live with his uncle and his cousin, who is about the same age, on a farm near Cardiff. ...

"Garis describes country sports and activities, farming life and the joys of living in the country, in loving detail. He also writes about the Onondaga Indians, the Cardiff Giant hoax and the salt industry in Syracuse. ...

"As boys used to say, 'It's a rattling good book.'"

Jim Towey will be bringing copies of *The White Crystals* (along with many of his other reprints of scarce books) to our convention in Portsmouth, and I heartily recommend buying a copy of this excellent story by an author who went on to become the most prominent early contract writer for the Stratemeyer Syndicate.



President's column

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led me to other books on the same topic which I bought to read; however, I made sure to purchase only first editions (some shipped from England), in fine condition, and in jacket. These books are now a permanent part of my collection. So I ask you, am I a reader first or a collector first?

I hope to see you in Portsmouth!

Your Partic'lar Friend,
Bob Sipes (PF-1067), Acting President
1004 School St.
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Wonder Lake, IL 60097
E-mail: jennifer.greeley@navy.mil

Karl E. Peace (PF-1111)
305 Wendwood Drive
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E-mail: peacekarl@frontier.com

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The Modern Age

Chapter 5

Teen Reading at the Turn of the Century (Part I)

Horatio Alger

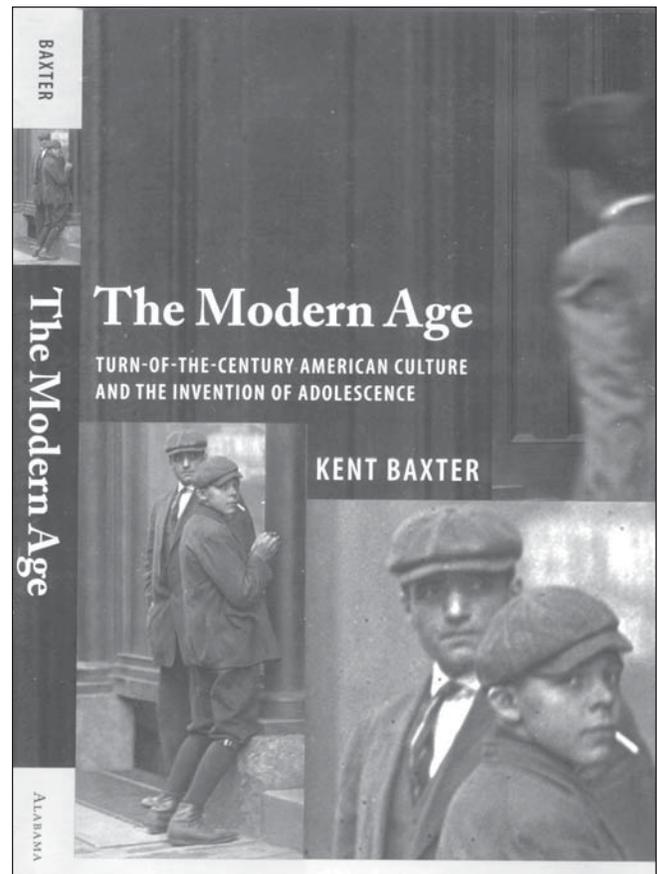
By Kent Baxter

Introduction: Kent Baxter's *The Modern Age: Turn-of-the-Century American Culture and the Invention of Adolescence* (The University of Alabama Press, 2008) focuses on ways in which views of adolescence were constructed around broad cultural anxieties about urban life at the dawn of the 20th century. By linking theoretical developments to fictional discourses of the period, Baxter argues that the impulsive, rebellious, and conflicted adolescent was invented to express a variety of concerns and fears linked to changes in American society — changes associated with modernity. The entire book should be of interest to members of the Horatio Alger Society. The chapter subsequent to the Alger chapter that appears below, also on teen reading at the turn of the century, focuses on Edward Stratemeyer as a literary producer.

Baxter begins *The Modern Age* by examining school reform, the creation of the juvenile court system, and demographic changes at the turn of the century. He then explores the role played by G. Stanley Hall and Margaret Mead in defining (and attempting to control) an apparently new and growing segment of the population. Baxter turns next to Native American reform movements in the late nineteenth century, and to autobiographical accounts of several girls' experiences in distant boarding schools designed to assimilate Indians. The following chapter examines the mythology and romanticization of Native Americans crafted by turn-of-the-century organizations such as the Camp Fire Girls and the Woodcraft Indians. The two chapters on teen reading at the turn of the century follow, and The University of Alabama Press and the author have graciously given us permission to reprint copyright material here — the Alger chapter. You can order a copy of *The Modern Age* by following the instructions from The University of Alabama Press Web site at <http://www.uapress.ua.edu/pages/Individuals.aspx> (which has links to a .pdf order form) or by calling (800) 621-2736, the Chicago distribution center for the Press. The book is also available from other major online booksellers.

— Carol Nackenoff (PF-921)

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Cheap Books and Their Readers

Late nineteenth-century American society experienced a remarkable increase in the production and consumption of printed texts. The expansion of the industry that took place after the Civil War has been attributed to a steady increase in literacy rates, the growth of the public library system, and new printing technologies and methods of distribution that made reading materials of many forms available to Americans from all socioeconomic classes.¹ Taking center stage in this expansion was the increase in “cheap books” made available to the public roughly between the 1870s and the enactment of the International Copyright Act in 1891. Such a “literary revolution,” as Madeleine Stern has termed it in her book on the subject, consisted of cheap reissues of English and French novels — which were unprotected by copyright laws — story papers, series books, and the dime novel, which Stern deems “perhaps the first uniquely American form of literature.”²

A natural connection has often been made between this “revolution” — in particular the dime novel — and children’s literature, especially in regard to juvenile literature and the early origins of the young adult novel. In her recent book *The Dime Novel in Children’s Literature*, for example, Vicki

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Anderson traces “the early writings [of children’s reading] as a background to what eventually became the dime novel and thereafter the basis of today’s paperback books,” placing the dime novel within a history that includes broadsides, chap-books, penny dreadfuls, series books, story papers, comics, and pulp fiction. In her well-known history of juvenile literature, *American Children’s Literature and the Construction of Childhood*, Gail Schmunk Murray devotes a section to the dimes, which she claims had “profound implications on the public’s reception of such bad boy fiction as *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*, and ensured that serial books would continue to entice young readers well into the twentieth century.” In their popular textbook *Literature for Today’s Young Adults*, Kenneth Donelson and Alleen Pace Nilsen identify dime novels along with domestic novels as the two most popular types of novels that emerged for young adults in the nineteenth century.³

However, before we rush to make this connection between “cheap books” and adolescent readers, it’s important to consider that most of these books were not consumed exclusively or even predominantly by teens. In his detailed study of the dime novel, for example, Michael Denning specifically dismisses the argument that dime novels were children’s literature, suggesting that the bulk of the reading audience of this immensely popular material were “workers — craft workers, factory operatives, domestic servants, and domestic workers.”⁴ Indeed, there is little evidence to support the notion that the dime novels, newspapers, and magazines that comprised this “literary revolution” were in any profound way oriented toward or consumed by teens. This is perhaps best captured by a notice from the publisher in one of the first Beadle dime novels, which expresses the firm’s hope “to reach all classes, old and young, male and female, in a manner at once to captivate and to enliven.”⁵

Interestingly, even though there is no data to suggest that “cheap books” such as the dime novel were exclusively or even largely read by teens, the many negative reactions to them at the time are often predicated upon the serious threat they posed to (innocent) teen readers. Indeed, even though Denning makes a convincing argument about age not being a factor in the audience for the dime novel, in the section he devotes to the censorship of these controversial texts almost all of the references he cites use age as an argument for banning. At the center of all of these calls to censor is Anthony Comstock, who established the Society for the Suppression of Vice, which campaigned against immoral and obscene books and materials and lobbied for the enforcement of the 1873 “Comstock Law” prohibiting the mailing of such material. In his analysis,

Denning includes an oft-quoted passage from Comstock’s 1882 book *Traps for the Young*, in which he has this to say about cheap books and their readers: “[T]he editor of the blood-and-thunder story papers, half-dime novels, and cheap stories of crime ... [is] willingly or unwillingly, [among] Satan’s efficient agents to advance his kingdom by destroying the young.” Comstock’s influence was significant, and Denning implies that he was the motivating force behind an 1886 bill passed by the Massachusetts legislature that “forbade the sale to minors of books or magazines featuring ‘criminal news, police reports, or accounts of criminal deeds, or pictures and stories of lust and crime.’”⁶ The relationship between cheap books and teens in these reactionary tracts was apparently used as a rhetorical device to incite fear in the American public. This rhetoric feeds off of emotionally charged notions of the “innocent child” that were common in nineteenth-century culture, but also such characterizations show a new conception of the teen, who was quite distinct from the innocent child and who was apparently seen by Comstock and others as having a newfound economic freedom and power to get in some real trouble if not handled properly.

As Beverly Clark has demonstrated in her book *Kiddie Lit*, a similar discourse of value informed much of the critical reception of American children’s literature in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, including the juvenile. “The many reasons why twentieth-century literary critics have looked down on children’s literature,” she argues, “include an urge to dissociate America and American literature from youthfulness and an insistence on cultural independence from the parent country. They include an urge to achieve ‘institutional maturity,’ as Renker puts it. Also suspect are the popularity and profitability of much children’s literature.”⁷ In terms of the juvenile, such popularity and profitability must have been an especially worrisome issue. The exact relationship between cheap books and this emerging demographic is an extremely complex issue, but what is apparent is that like “juvenile delinquency” and “wayward youth,” “cheap books” became a way to articulate fears about an adolescent population that was becoming more conspicuous at the end of the nineteenth century. Even though it’s not clear to what extent teens actually consumed these books, the two categories have a symbolic connection that has remained with us to this day.

The novels of Horatio Alger and Edward Stratemeyer were linked in very complicated ways with this literary revolution and fears about the effects of cheap books on teens. Although Alger’s novels precede those of Stratemeyer by a generation, their works — spanning the turn of the century — show many commonalities and can tell us a great deal about the cultural environment that invented adolescence. Sharing an awareness of the great potential of the teen demographic, the work of these authors served to

create a new teen readership and at the same time to control and shape this readership. As with the other inventors of adolescence, the space carved out for this teen population, as reflected in the characters and implied reader in the works of these two authors, was rehabilitative in nature and thus predicated upon the perceived threat this audience posed. Furthermore, the same economic discourse that has framed discussions of cheap reading by critics then and now shaped the narrative qualities of the works of these two authors and served as a way to censor what many feared about the modern generation. In part, the economic focus reflects an anxiety over the cheap reading both Alger and Stratemeyer had devoted their careers to producing, but it also represents the ultimate solution to the problem of adolescence. While the word *cheap* framed such discussions in economic terms, *economic* was broadly defined to include moral value as well and thus served as a method of controlling the main character and the implied reader. As we have seen in chapter 1, material changes in American society made teens more conspicuous and there was a marked anxiety about what this population might do if its members were left to their own devices. In general, the work of Alger and Stratemeyer seeks to put this disenfranchised and dangerously idle demographic back to work. Adolescence began as an economic problem, so it is perhaps no surprise that its solution might be figured as an economic one as well.

The Natural Science of Child Saving

Horatio Alger is a particularly complex figure in regard to the relationship between the teen population in the nineteenth century and the revolution of cheap books. A writer of over one hundred “juveniles,” Alger is, of course, commonly seen as being one of the first authors to capitalize on the teen reading public that was becoming a growing market in the later half of the nineteenth century, but it’s not clear whether his readership was wholly or even partially teens. A number of times in his career he spoke out against the negative influences of cheap books, dime novels in particular, but his works were published with some of the same firms that made these texts available to the reading public, and since many of his novels were sold in cheap reprints after his death — two situations over which he had no control — he has become closely associated with this revolution. What is clear is that he often focused on this teen demographic in his fiction and, as I will argue here, created a type of adolescence in his implied reader.⁸

Early in his life, Alger actually had moderate success writing fiction and poetry for adult magazines and literary weeklies, but, as Gary Schamhorst describes it in his biography of Alger, the author had a significant change of heart in 1864 when he decided to “abandon his dream of literary distinction” and devote his energies to a “humbler

department which would pay ... better.’ He would henceforth write for children.”⁹ Schamhorst’s characterization of this critical moment in Alger’s career is an interesting one on many levels. That Alger’s decision was conceived not only in terms of economic value but also social value, where he had to sacrifice the lofty field of literature for the “humbler department” of writing for children, tells us a great deal not only about the (questionable) status of juvenile literature in the middle of the nineteenth century, but also much about people’s attitudes toward the teen population. Because teens became synonymous with the growing publishing market, particularly the expansion of cheap books, one could not, it seems, write about and for them without being seen as more of a capitalist than an artist. The value of the author in this area was defined by the status of the genre itself, which is to say it was thought of in terms of economic and not literary value. The former, as can be seen in the quote from Schamhorst, was commonly thought of in much less noble terms than the latter. Indeed, the two were united in the broader theater of status, in which the literary producer was valued far less than the literary author.

The teen demographic that Horatio Alger took such an interest in was not so much growing as just becoming more conspicuous in the late nineteenth century, and even though such an awareness of this population was profitable for Alger and his publishers, it was by no means unique. As we have seen, anxiety about the expanding teen population was articulated in many different forms in late nineteenth-century American society. Alger actually became good friends and associates with one of the strongest voices about the potential threat of this expansion, Charles Loring Brace, whose 1872 work *The Dangerous Classes of New York and Twenty Years’ Work Among Them*, as was discussed earlier [in chapter 1], was one of the common sources for the dissemination of the notion of the rise in juvenile delinquency in nineteenth-century American consciousness.

Alger, of course, made a career out of writing about children on the streets of New York. His most popular series, *Ragged Dick*, was inspired by boys he met at the Newsboys’ Lodging House, a dormitory for homeless boys developed by Brace and his society in 1854.¹⁰ In his 1868 preface to this series he made clear his hope that the works would not only entertain but also enlist “the sympathies of his readers in behalf of the unfortunate children whose life is described, and of leading them to co-operate with the praiseworthy efforts now made by the Children’s Aid Society and other organizations to ameliorate their condition.” The series is peppered with references to the society and its work, and we even get a grand tour of “the Lodge” in the third installment of the six-volume series.¹¹ As such, Alger and Brace shared the common goal of wanting to create a space for these unkempt urchins of the street. Such an enterprise involved first defining who they were, describing

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their peculiar behaviors, and then proposing a plausible plan to save them. This scheme was all predicated upon the belief, of course, that the “street Arab” was a problem in the first place. Like Brace — and Hall and Mead, for that matter — Alger’s work is rehabilitative, and, as such, it was posited as a way to contain a seeming threat.

But what was this threat? And what does Brace and Alger’s approach to it reveal about nineteenth-century attitudes toward the teen population that would soon be known as adolescence? As reflected in his many writings on the subject, at the root of Brace’s approach to the growing problem of the street Arab was a belief that environment shaped behavior. In his biography of Brace, Stephen O’Connor notes that much of Brace’s notion of the rehabilitative ideal came from Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, which he claimed, on a number of occasions, to have read thirteen times in his lifetime. For Brace, Darwin became scientific proof that environment could influence the development of the species.¹² To change the species, one simply needs to change the environment. To change the delinquent, one simply needs to put him or her in a new environment that would force the good traits to develop instead of the bad. In *The Dangerous Classes*, for example, Brace says the following about the effect of environment on this problem: “At heart we cannot say that [the “Arab of the streets”] is much corrupted; his sins belong to his ignorance and his condition, and are often easily corrected by a radical change of circumstances. The oaths, tobacco-spitting, and slang, and even the fighting and stealing of a street-boy, are not so bad as they look. Refined influences, the checks of religion, and a fairer chance for existence without incessant struggle, will often utterly eradicate these evil habits, and the rough, thieving New York vagrant make an honest, hard-working Western pioneer.”¹³ In Brace’s mind, radically changing circumstances to more “refined influences” would “utterly eradicate” habits learned and enable the street boy to evolve into the “Western pioneer” instead of something here not stated, but clearly far worse — something degenerative. Such a Darwinian approach to the problem of wayward youth became the rationale behind the many programs of the Children’s Aid Society, most famously the “Orphan Trains” that would cart the homeless out of the inner city and put them up for adoption in the country. Darwin was of particular interest to Brace because his theories offered an indisputable, scientific basis for the efficacy of such work.

But, of course, Brace molded Darwin to his own ends. In the case of the “Arab of the streets” mentioned above, the “struggle for existence” does not naturally select the optimum traits for the species, but rather the struggle is “cor-



STREET ARABS.

From Charles Loring Brace, *The Dangerous Classes of New York, and Twenty Years’ Work Among Them*. New York: Wynkoop & Hallenbeck, 1872; reprinted, n.d., by the National Association of Social Workers, Washington, D.C., *NASW Classic Series*, facing Page 176.

rected” by the Children’s Aid Society, put in check, and, for all intents and purposes, evolution is reprogrammed by the society itself. Throughout Brace’s work, the Darwinian struggle for existence is presented not as natural fact, but rather as a negative circumstance that can be corrected by Christian charity. Often in his work, Brace justifies such a misapplication of the natural laws of Darwin by reading him in broad, quasi-religious terms, seeing the evolution of the human race as a movement from evil to good. As he states in a telling writing on the topic of natural selection: “The current of all created things, or of all phenomena, is towards higher forms of life. Natural selection is a means of arriving at the best. ... Nature moves physically towards perfection, and morally there must be the same unseen but necessary motion. For if the Darwinian theory be true, the law of natural selection applies to all the moral history of mankind, as well as to the physical. Evil must die ultimately as the

weaker element in the struggle with good. The slow consent of the world's history is in the direction of moral goodness, as its physical development is ever towards higher forms."¹⁴ In this case, the natural law becomes more of a religious truth than a scientific one. Removing children from the street was justified and "natural" because it was aiding the human race's evolution from savagery to civilization, evil to good. Brace read Darwin thirteen times, not only because he provided scientific justification for the change in environment his society was providing for children of the street, but also because he saw in his work a paradigm for the moral and religious beliefs upon which such work was based.

Such an interpretation of Darwin was, of course, very convenient for Brace, but it was by no means unusual. Indeed, it is in close proximity to Herbert Spencer's unified evolutionary theory, with which Brace was most certainly familiar. In his study of the influence of Darwin and Spencer on American intellectual thought, Richard Hofstadter has made the very convincing case that much of the appeal of Spencer is that his attempt to link Darwin's biological observations to a unified evolutionary theory made his work adaptable to almost any intellectual context and thus very appealing to many thinkers who, like Brace, were searching for scientific proof to make their work more convincing and appealing to their intellectual peers and potential donors. "Spencer's philosophy was admirably suited to the American scene," Hofstadter explains. "It was scientific in derivation and comprehensive in scope. It had a reassuring theory of progress based upon biology and physics. It was large enough to be all things to all men.... It offered a comprehensive world-view, uniting under one generalization everything in nature from protozoa to politics."¹⁵

As such, it is tempting, of course, to align Brace's philanthropic enterprise with social Darwinists such as William Graham Sumner and American businessmen like Rockefeller and Carnegie, who saw Spencer's infamous phrase the "survival of the fittest" as a blank check for capitalist industry. This is particularly tempting because in addition to getting teens out of the struggle for existence that characterized their life on the streets, training them in the "habits of industry," Brace tells us a number of times throughout his work, was key to their ability to evolve in the right direction.¹⁶ But I think such an alignment is a simplification of the work of Brace. Brace borrowed from Darwin the notion that environment can shape behavior. What he borrowed from Spencer and what he shared with social Darwinists like Sumner and Carnegie was the belief in a unified theory of evolution and the intellectual prowess to connect biology with economics and issues of morality. This did not come in the form so much of an application of survival of the fittest to economics — which would have been at odds with the moral implications of his work — but in the use of the general structure of Darwin's thought as a way to bridge the gap between economics and morality and a comfortableness in using economic language to describe moral issues. As such, capitalism was not so much the



THE STREET BOY ON A FARM.

From Charles Loring Brace, *The Dangerous Classes of New York, and Twenty Years' Work Among Them*. New York: Wynkoop & Hallenbeck, 1872; reprinted, n.d., by the National Association of Social Workers, Washington, D.C., *NASW Classic Series*, facing Page 242.

ultimate end of the work of Brace as it was a convenient and persuasive means to express it. Such a unified model provided the context for the seeming threat of a growing teen population that, homeless or not, was becoming more conspicuous on the American landscape. The first step was always a change in environment. Such a change aligned the individual with the moral evolution of humankind. The rewards for evolving down this path were always economic, not only because such "pioneers" would be well trained in industry, but because the moral and economic were intimately related, and moral "value" could be easily calculated in economic terms.

In one of the final chapters of *The Dangerous Classes*, in
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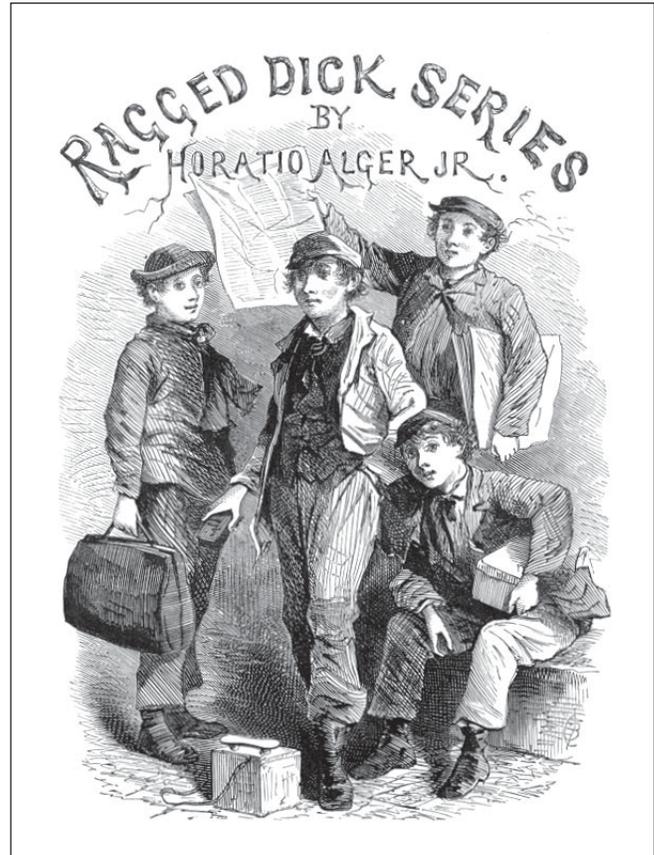
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which Brace discusses the decrease in juvenile delinquency in New York since the founding of his society and the amount of money such a decrease has saved the city, he concludes: "If our readers will refer back to these dry but cheering tables of statistics, they will see what a vast sum of human misery saved is a reduction, in the imprisonment of female vagrants. ... How much homelessness and desperation spared! How much crime and wretchedness diminished are expressed in those simple figures! ...The same considerations, both of economy and humanity, apply to each of the results that appear in these tables of crime and punishment. No outlay of money for public purposes which any city or its inhabitants can make, repays itself half so well as its expenses for charities which prevent crime among children."¹⁷ Scientific figures are united with moral good and ultimately economic prosperity. The return on the investment, unlike the "outlay of money for public purposes," can be seen in the context of both economy and humanity, because the two are one, united in the broader scope of human and humane evolution.¹⁸

Working the Right Way in Ragged Dick

As revealed in the introduction to the Ragged Dick series, Charles Loring Brace and Horatio Alger shared a common goal of ridding the streets of New York of juvenile delinquents, but close examination of the novels in this series reveals that they were united in other ways as well. A close reading of the Ragged Dick series demonstrates that the books contextualized the "problem" of the new teen population in much the same terms and took the same theoretical approach to it. It is not clear whether: Alger read Darwin and Spencer, but such a model, a unified theory of evolution that drew together biology, ethics, religion, and economics, I would like to argue, was turned into an entire universe by Alger, who used it as a central tenet of his books about and for this teen audience. This made sense to Alger as a worldview, but also it worked for him as a fictional paradigm. By putting his heroes in such a developmental stage, Alger allowed his characters and his readers to see firsthand how their behavior could be either an asset or a liability, could help them either evolve or devolve.

This developmental stage was an early form of adolescence and, for Alger, it was intimately tied up with moral economics; In her book *The Fictional Republic: Horatio Alger and American Political Discourse*, Carol Nackenoff makes the argument that this adolescent paradigm is reflective of a broader crisis in American society at the turn of the century. "Alger's basic story may be read as an allegory,"



she points out. "The trials of the young are the trials of the Republic. In the success of the former lies the triumph of the latter. Entering its adolescence, facing Civil War, immigration, urbanization, industrialization, increasing polarization of rich and poor, corruption, greed, materialism and selfishness — all of which threaten to tear it apart — the Republic's triumph lay in the preservation of virtue, meaning its integrity, identity, independence, and freedom. Alger's fiction does battle for the Republic."¹⁹ Published in between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and inhabited by characters in between childhood and adulthood, Alger's work attempts to negotiate conflict on many different levels; as such, it certainly fits a common paradigm of adolescence. But more important, I believe, is the attempt in these texts to craft a workable path out of this crisis and into the seemingly stable space of adulthood.

Alger actually promoted the cause of the Newsboys' Lodging House and the work of the Children's Aid Society a number of times before he introduced the institution and its inhabitants into popular consciousness through the Ragged Dick series. In an 1867 article in the *Liberal Christian*, for example, he gives a detailed account of a visit to "the Lodge" and ends with an appeal that could just as easily have come from *The Dangerous Classes*: "Just think what it is to pluck a boy out of the perils and pitfalls of a

great city," he concludes in a Darwinian fashion, "and save him from a career of vice and crime to one of usefulness and honesty, and you will not hesitate to engage in the great work of practical beneficence."²⁰

As noted above, such an appeal is continued in the preface to the Ragged Dick series, but further examination of the series indicates that Alger hoped that defining and explaining this strange breed would do more than enlist sympathy on the part of his readers and motivate them to open their pocketbooks. By the time of the second book in the series (*Fame and Fortune; or, The Progress of Richard Hunter*), Alger's preface reveals that he sees his books as a way of rehabilitating the very street Arabs he is describing. "The author has sought to depict the inner life and represent the feelings and emotions of these little waifs of city life," he claims, "and hopes thus to excite a deeper and more widespread sympathy in the public mind, as well as to exert a salutary influence upon the class of whom he is writing, by setting before them inspiring examples of what energy, ambition, and an honest purpose may achieve, even in their case." In order to better "exert a salutary influence" upon this readership, Alger even goes so far as to instruct his publisher to send gratuitous copies of the first two volumes of the series to "any regularly organized Newsboys Lodge within the United States."²¹

Fiction here for Alger was a way of changing the environment, of inciting an existence without struggle, and thus a way of rehabilitating in the image of what he saw as the model youth. Alger's fictional world becomes, then, the new environment that will naturally select the positive qualities and help the individual evolve in the right direction. But clearly these "little waifs of city life" were not the only ones who were to be rehabilitated through this tool. In the opening pages of the first volume of the series, Alger has this to say about his hero: "I have mentioned Dick's faults and defects, because I want it understood, to begin with, that I don't consider him a model boy. But there were some good points about him nevertheless. He was above doing anything mean or dishonorable. He would not steal, or cheat, or impose upon younger boys, but was frank and straight-forward, manly and self-reliant. His nature was a noble one, and had saved him from all mean faults. I hope my

readers will like him as I do, without being blind to his faults. Perhaps, although he was only a bootblack, they may find something in him to imitate."²² Alger's work is rehabilitative not only because he literally used it as a device to help the "Arab of the street," but also because he saw it as a way to reform the implied reader, who would "imitate" the "good points" of its hero. Dick was not a "model boy," but his positive qualities (frank, straightforward, manly, self-reliant) could form an abstract representation of a model boy that the reader could become through the reading process. Alger's implied readers, then, become both the "little waifs of city life" and those who might find something in Ragged Dick to imitate, those not, perhaps, in his circumstance but much like him just the same. Such a construction is, of course, based upon the

natural premise that the reader — who, we would assume, is approximately the same age as Ragged Dick and thus still able to evolve in a good or bad direction — is in need of some guidance in the first place. As such, it reveals a great deal about attitudes toward teens, who were perceived as much less "model boys" and much more Ragged Dicks.

The rehabilitative focus of the series and its intended effect on the reader is perhaps most apparent in the fifth volume (*Ben the Luggage Boy; or,*

Among the Wharves), which recounts the "true history" of a young boy from a well-to-do family who, when unjustly punished by his father, runs away to New York for six years. Though he decides to swallow his pride and return home to his family in the end, the time he spends selling newspapers and "smashing baggage" has a positive effect on Ben who, once home, "would run a chance of being spoiled by over-indulgence, if his hard discipline as a street boy had not given him a manliness and self-reliance above his years."²³ Such a plot universalizes the experience of the Arab of the street, making it accessible to all teen readers. It also says a great deal about the fear of the street Arab, a category that is broadened here to mean not only the homeless waif of the street but all teens because all teens have the potential to turn to a life of crime. Concomitantly, as readers identify with Ben and perhaps emulate him, the plot provides a path to follow, behavior to practice, in order to evolve in the right direction.

Alger's texts, then, enact the very philanthropic enterprise

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"SMASH YER BAGGAGE, MUM?"

From *Ben the Luggage Boy*, frontispiece. Boston: A.K. Loring, 1870.

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they describe. If Alger's fiction is the method through which this change of environment will occur, then Alger himself, as author, is the benefactor who instigates and funds such a change. Models for such a benefactor figure, of course, fill his works. In Darwinian terms they are the impetus behind the change in environment that allows evolution to flow in the correct direction. In the third volume of the series, *Mark, the Match Boy*, on the character of the "numerous class of improvident boys," the narrator notes that these teens are "not naturally bad, they drift into bad habits from the force of outward circumstances."²⁴ These outward circumstances are changed for our hero Ragged Dick in the first two volumes of the series through the kindness of Mr. Whitney, who gives Dick a new suit; Mr. Greyson, who invites him to church; Mr. Rockwell, who gives him a high-paying job; and Mr. Murdock, who helps Dick with his investments. Dick himself becomes a benefactor when, in volume 3, he takes the homeless Mark under his wing and becomes his "guardian." Dick arranges to have Mark stay at his boarding place, starts him on a course of study, assists him in getting a job and, of course, takes him to church. Becoming the ultimate benefactor, and "model boy," at the end of the novel, Dick donates the one thousand dollars he is paid for his services to the Newsboys' Lodging House. The long list of benefactors continues in volume 4, *Rough and Ready*, with Mr. Turner, who gives Rufus a position in his firm; in volume 5, *Ben the Luggage Boy*, with the nameless reporter who gives Ben the money he needs to get started in his newspaper business; and in volume 6, *Rufus and Rose*, with Mr. Vanderpool, who gives Rufus not only a place to live but some bonds that turn out to be worth fifty thousand dollars.

The philanthropic interest the benefactor takes in the prospective hero is a staple in almost all of Alger's fiction. Michael Moon has argued that such an interest is a type of seduction, and the capitalist narrative in Alger's novels both facilitates and rewards a taboo relationship between benefactor and boy. "The 'magic trick' that the Alger text ultimately performs," Moon reasons, "is to recuperate the possibility of a man's taking an intense interest in an attractive boy without risking being vilified or persecuted for doing so — indeed, this 'interest' is taken in a manner that is made thoroughly congruent with the social requirements of corporate capitalism on the sides of both parties: boy and potential employer alike 'profit' from it."²⁵ Given the focus on the external looks of the heroes in Alger's work and the economic framework of their moral/economic rise, Moon's reading of the hero/benefactor relationships is persuasive. I would add that such an interest must also on some level be motivated by fear as well, a fear of what might happen to the "gentle boy from the dangerous classes"

— to borrow a phrase from Moon — if he were left to his own devices, without the path of adolescence offered by the benefactor and the path that these texts offer the implied teen reader.

However we frame this relationship between hero and benefactor, the success that follows is testimony to the power of environment in shaping character. Indeed, even the worst possible specimen of boyhood in the Ragged Dick series, Roswell Crawford, has hope if his environment is changed. In the third volume, Roswell, who, as he constantly reminds everyone, was once the "son of a gentleman" but has fallen upon hard times, takes the path of all those boys aboard the "Orphan Trains." "Let us hope that, away from the influences of the city," the narrator tells us, "[h]is character may be improved, and become more manly and self-reliant. It is only just to say that he was led to appropriate what did not belong to him, by the desire to gratify his vanity, and through the influence of a bad advisor."²⁶

It is very telling that the problem teen that Alger's fiction is purportedly hoping to save becomes the model to be emulated by his implied reader. Alger often glosses over this seeming paradox by claiming that he is simply being more realistic. In the fourth volume in the series, *Rough and Ready; or, Life among the New York Newsboys*, for example, after frankly listing some of the chief faults of the book's protagonist — a tactic he repeats in most of the other books in the series as well — Alger provides the following justification for his focus on such suspect characters: "In fact, one reason why I do not introduce any model boys into my stories is that I do not find them in real life. I know a good many of various degrees of goodness; but most of them have more failings than one — failings which are natural to boys, springing oftentimes more from thoughtlessness than actual perverseness. These faults they must struggle with, and by determined effort they will be able, with God's help, to overcome them."²⁷ Such a focus on "real-life" boys with problems to overcome eliminates the distance between the waifs of the street in New York and all other teens by joining them in their "failings which are natural to boys." This focus also has the effect of centering the plot on the development of the protagonist and thus explores what he can become when he follows the right path. As such, although he often argues to the contrary, the world that Alger describes here is just as much about the model youth the hero aspires to be — and, ultimately, will become — as the homeless child of the street. Alger may not portray any "model boys" in his fiction, but always implicit in the rise of the flawed character is a model of behavior that can and should be practiced by any youth who wants to develop in the right direction.

Although Alger provides the reader with a "realistic" glimpse into how some flawed characters can redeem themselves if placed in the right environment, he clearly was not totally convinced of the Darwinian notion of natural selection. Although there may be no model boys in his work, there are

some that have greater potential than others, thus implying that there are some innate, essential qualities that one must be born with, a “noble nature” that will bloom if put in the proper environment. Such innate goodness is often recognized by the benefactor, who becomes a type of weather vane to judge who might be able to make it in the new environment and who is simply a lost cause. As Mr. Greyson tells Dick in the first volume of the series when inviting him to church, “You evidently have some good principles to start with, as you have shown by your scorn for dishonesty.” And if the benefactor doesn’t notice, then Alger himself makes sure we don’t miss the point, offering friendly qualifications now and then, like “Dick was a naturally smart boy” or “Of religious and moral instruction he had then received none; but something told him that it was mean to steal, and he was true to this instinctive feeling.”²⁸

Such “natural” and “instinctive” qualities, as essential as they are, are not predominant in all youth, however. Ragged Dick’s foil character, Micky Maguire, for example, is placed in a new, positive environment in the second volume of the series when he secures a job — due in large part to Dick’s influence — in the firm of Rockwell & Hunter. But void of any “noble nature,” he is not destined for such great things as Dick is. “Micky has already turned out much better than was expected,” Alger tells us, “but he is hardly likely to rise much higher than the subordinate position he now occupies. In capacity and education he is far inferior to his old associate, Richard Hunter, who is destined to rise much higher than at present.”²⁹ Dick is superior to Micky in “capacity,” that illusive quality that, when combined with the correct environment, enables him to rise, which is to say evolve in the right, good direction. Micky is not bad per se — but not as sure of an investment as Dick.

As many critics have noted, such “capacity” often comes with good looks, which serve as a key to the benefactor as to who has the ability to better themselves and who does not. Gary Scharnhorst, for example, has shown that such a correlation between capacity and beauty was inspired by Alger’s familiarity with the pseudosciences of phrenology and physiognomy, which he used to distinguish between both good and evil characters in his work.³⁰ Alger actually makes direct references to such theories, as is the case in *Ben the Luggage Boy*, when he tells us that even though Ben had a pleasant face, “there was a flash in his eye, when aroused, which showed that he had a quick temper, and there was an expression of firmness, unusual to one so young, which might have been read by an experienced physiognomist.”³¹ Alger’s use of these paradigms in relation to these waifs of the street is quite appropriate given, as we have seen in chapter 1, that such theories, and in particular the work of Cesare Lombroso, were the predominant way to understand juvenile delinquency in this time period.

Applying an economic gloss to this, however, I think it’s

important to note that Alger does not exactly describe Dick’s beauty, but rather emphasizes how his external qualities are consistent with his inner, moral nature — in other words, there is balance between what he advertises and what he delivers. For example, at the beginning of Dick’s rise, his benefactor, Mr. Whitney, agrees to invest in him not because he is good-looking — although no doubt that plays a part — but because he “looks honest” and has an “open face.”³² Such descriptors are consistent with how Dick and other heroes are described throughout the series; and, lest we forget, Alger reminds us again and again that Dick looks “frank,” “straightforward,” “open,” and “honest.”³³ Such qualities imply that there is no discrepancy between what Dick believes and what he does — the inside is consistent with the outside. This includes spending habits, too. You must spend in accordance with what you make, you must charge what you are worth, and you must look what you believe — there can be no inconsistency between the two. This is part of Alger’s economic understanding of character. A business is successful by balancing its spendings and earnings. This is how people are financially successful, but also it is the way that they are morally successful. They have a realistic understanding of their strengths and weaknesses and do not advertise in any other way.

In contrast to Dick is James Travis, for example, who is not only a “coarse-looking fellow,” but his physical appearance is clearly linked with the fact that “he had no great fancy for work at all, and would have been glad to find some other way of obtaining money enough to pay his expenses,”³⁴ or, even worse, the woman on the bus in the first volume who accuses Dick of stealing. She is wrapped up in a particularly bad exterior (her “sharp visage and thin lips did not seem to promise a very pleasant disposition”), not only because she’s lazy but also because she doubts the axiom that you can indeed tell if someone is honest by that person’s appearance. “You can’t tell by looks,” she says when someone points out that Dick could not have stolen her pocketbook because he does not have the proper countenance for a criminal. “They’re deceitful; villains are generally well dressed.”³⁵ Contrary to this opinion, the villains in the Ragged Dick series, and arguably in Alger’s work in general, are fairly well marked. Mark’s abusive guardian, Mrs. Watson, in *Mark, the Match Boy*, for example, is appropriately described as a “coarse-looking woman”; Mrs. Waters’s obnoxious daughter in *Rough and Ready* is described as “a short, dumpy little girl, of extreme plainness”; and the evil counterfeiter in *Rufus and Rose* is “a man of middle age, with bushy whiskers, and a scar on his left cheek. He wore a loose sack coat, and a velvet vest. His thick, bunch fingers displayed two large showy rings, set with stones, probably imitation.”³⁶

Given this natural correlation between the physical and the moral, arguably, the biggest crime that can be committed in the world of Alger is for there to be a discrepancy between

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external and internal, for someone to advertise something they cannot provide. In the first volume of the series, when Dick gives Frank a tour of New York City, really what he gives is a tour of false business, which is to say immoral practices. There is the tailor who claims to be selling suits at “less than cost,” the “Grand Closing-Out Sale!” where everything seemingly costs a dollar, the stockbroker Samuel Snap who promises a “fortune” in shares of the Excelsior Copper Mining Company and, of course, the array of “swindlers” who offer them a lost pocketbook seemingly full of cash for twenty dollars and pass off a false check to an ignorant countryman. In each case, there is a discrepancy between advertisement and truth, and in each case, Dick, “frank” and “straight-forward” as he is, sees the truth and wittily exposes the lie. Like this walk through New York, the Ragged Dick series is filled with swindlers and confidence men, who attempt to profit by pretending to be something they are not. Such dishonesty perhaps reaches its pinnacle in the counterfeiter we meet in the final volume, described above, whose physical qualities symbolize his hypocritical nature and whose occupation is the worst form of false advertising.

If consistency between internal and external is the optimum state for an individual, both morally and physically, then nothing is more reprehensible than “putting on airs,” acting like something one is not or advertising that one has more capital than one really has. The best example of this in the Ragged Dick series has to be Roswell Crawford. As mentioned earlier, Roswell’s oft-touted status as the “son of a gentleman” is a sham that he parades to feel a sense of power over Dick and his “kind.” His character flaw, then, is dishonesty, but in the world of Alger the moral and the economic are intimately related. In his short-lived position at Mr. Baker’s bookstore, Roswell takes liberties that even the proprietors themselves rarely display: “To see the pompous air with which Roswell threw himself back in his chair,” Alger tells us, “it might have been supposed that he was the proprietor of the establishment, though I believe it is true, as a general rule, that employers are not in the habit of putting on so many airs, unless the position is a new one and they have not yet got over the new feeling of importance which it is apt to inspire at first.”³⁷ Roswell’s problem is one of false advertising, but also one that implies a discrepancy between what one claims to be worth and what one is actually worth. As Alger tells us, “One who wants to climb the ladder of success must, except in rare cases, commence at the lowest round. This was what Roswell did not like. He wanted to begin half-way up at the very least.”³⁸ Such a “putting on airs” is of course quite the opposite of Dick’s “frank” character, where what you see is what you get. Even when in the early pages of the series, Dick is blessed with a new

suit and may be accused of “getting above his business” from his fellow bootblacks, Alger assures us that “[t]here was nothing of what boys call ‘big feeling’ about him.”³⁹

In any case, the combination of innate goodness and external environment is a winning one for our hero, and whether it’s in the form of a new suit, access to new society, a new job, or new skills, the benefactor creates a new environment where the good qualities can come to the surface.⁴⁰ The success of the new environment always, of course, comes in the form of capital. In the first volume of the series, the change of environment that Dick experiences as a result of his interaction with Mr. Whitney and his son is symbolized by the five dollars that he puts in his bank account. “He felt himself a capitalist,” the narrator tells us, and it’s a feeling that grows by leaps and bounds as Dick puts his nose to the grindstone, as it were, and rises in his new environment. “In the boot-blacking business, as well as in higher avocations, the same rule prevails, that energy and industry are rewarded and indolence suffers,” the narrator relates, and Dick’s energy and industry turn his 5 dollars quickly into 117 dollars.⁴¹

According to Carol Nackenoff, such a connection between cash and virtue was a way for the Harvard Unitarian-educated Alger to adapt his characters to a world threatened by the profit motive: “A cash reward or transfer cements and reinforces fellow-feeling — that ‘something extra’ inclining people to be virtuous. People *must* be paid for their acts of kindness, or in a world increasingly dominated by the profit motive, acts of kindness and bonds of community will vanish. This economic incentive to justice cements Alger’s tie to the language of the emerging era. Many in his audience would remember the payoff but not the moral message. It was only if the two could be conjoined that the old values could be successfully brought to the new era.”⁴² In addition to enforcing this economic incentive to justice, such a connection between cash and virtue also enables Dick to see the vital connection between economic development and moral development. As Dick will explain later in the series, the critical turning point in his “rise” was not the five dollars given him by Mr. Whitney, but rather the advice given him by Frank, which first “made him ambitious.”⁴³ Frank’s advice is as moral as it is economic: “And you must not only work hard, but work in the right way,” he tells Dick, “You began in the right way when you determined never to steal, or do anything mean or dishonorable, however strongly tempted to do so. That will make people have confidence in you when they come to know you.”⁴⁴ Working in “the right way” is the key to Dick’s success because it guides him through a universe where the economic and the moral are intimately related. In the fictional world of Alger, hard work is rewarded, but “hard work” includes not being tempted to do anything “mean or dishonorable” and most important not being tempted to steal, because such behaviors create a discrepancy between one’s market value and

one's moral value. We are reminded again and again in the Ragged Dick series of the heroes' determination never to steal because this would be the ultimate crime in a world where the moral and the economic are so closely tied.⁴⁵

Since stealing represents the ultimate crime, then it is perhaps no surprise that the drama of each novel hinges upon stolen property that must be returned to its rightful owner — as with Dick's stolen bankbook in the first volume of the series — or Dick himself being accused of stealing, as is the case when Dick is framed by Micky Maguire and Mr. Gilbert in the second volume. The latter, of course, is the most dramatic because it represents not only the breaking of the law of property but also of the law of character, the two being one and the same in the world of Alger. Mark is similarly framed in the third volume of the series by none other than Roswell Crawford. In volume 5, *Ben the Luggage Boy*, Ben's character is momentarily called into question when some money he is transporting is stolen,

but he is able to track down the thief and return the property to its rightful owner, getting a hefty reward for his efforts. The theft of property is particularly dramatic in volumes 4 and 6 of the series, since Rufus's stepfather, Mr. Martin, steals not only a box of cash and bonds Rufus is transporting for his job, he also steals his sister, young Rosie, whom he uses as a beggar to get money; in this case, it's bad enough that she is kidnapped, but to be trained into a life of panhandling is just too much to bear.

Frank's advice that Dick work in "the right way" recontextualizes Dick's entire character, providing him access to a world where success could be measured in something other than a mansion on "Fifth Avenoo." As Mrs. Greyson explains Dick's status during one of his earliest ventures into such a world: "Dick cannot be called poor ... since he earns his living by his own exertions."⁴⁶ She mixes up economic poverty with moral poverty. One can be poor only if one does not earn one's own money. But most important, Frank's advice shows Dick how to "rise" in this economy, in which capital is used as a gauge of moral behavior. And Dick takes this lesson to heart, rising from "rags to respectability" in a universe that respects his "frank" manner. As Alger tells us at the end of the first

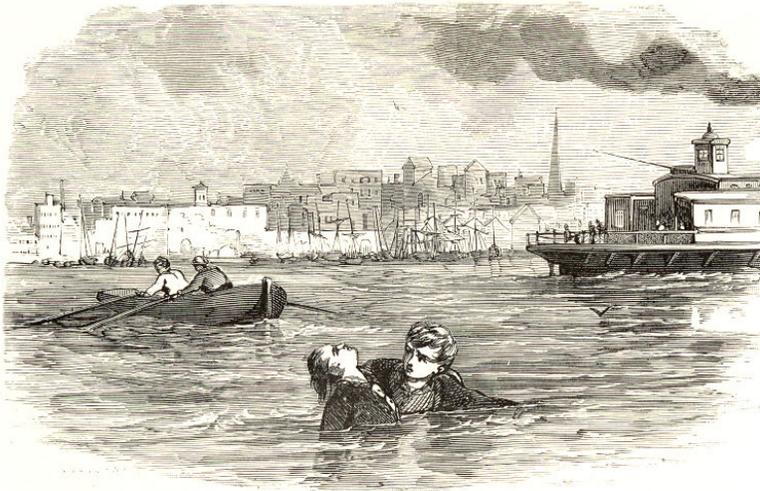
volume, "In more ways than one, Dick was beginning to reap the advantage of his self-denial and judicious economy."⁴⁷ Here the economic and the moral are cleft together in one sentence.

Many critics have commented on the role luck plays in the rise of the heroes in Alger's work, focusing in particular on how luck interferes with the capitalist system portrayed in this world.⁴⁸ As evidenced in the Ragged Dick series, such incidents are not about how lucky the heroes are as much as about how they capitalize upon the situations that luck furnishes for

them, how they act in such a way that distinguishes them from other, less moral and less successful, boys. An excellent example of this is when Dick saves Mr. Rockwell's son at the end of the first novel. This event will, of course, be key in Dick's rise because it gets him the high-paying position at Rockwell's firm. But it's important to note that Rockwell gives Dick the job not only because he feels he owes him for the life of his son but because Dick's selfless act indicates some

quality in him that Rockwell thinks is essential for success in the capitalist system. "[N]ot many boys would have risked their lives for a stranger," Rockwell tells Dick, and in the moral economy, such a risk on Dick's part puts Rockwell in his debt: "My brave boy," he tells him, "I owe you a debt I can never repay." Mr. Rockwell begins to pay this limitless debt, of course, with a position in his firm and a salary of ten dollars a week. Dick "honestly" admits, "It's more than I can earn," but such a discrepancy is explained by the fact that he's being paid not for the errands he will run for Mr. Rockwell's shop but for the "work" he performed and the risk he took in saving the drowning boy.⁴⁹ Saving Rockwell's son turns into the capital that ultimately saves Dick from a life on the street. Similar examples of luck can be found in the other novels in the series; for example, in *Rough and Ready*, Rufus just happens to overhear two thugs planning a robbery of Mr. Turner, but more important he is resourceful and brave enough to act upon the situation and save Mr. Turner from harm, an action that then leads to a high-paying position in his firm. Regarding the role that luck plays in this economy, Mr. Rockwell perhaps puts it best in *Fame and Fortune* when he explains to Micky Maguire, who is downcast for not enjoying as much luck as his more

(Continued on Page 16)



DICK SAVING JOHNNY.

From *Ragged Dick*, facing Page 284. Boston: A.K. Loring, 1868.

The Modern Age

(Continued from Page 15)

successful peer, that “Dick may have been lucky ... but I generally find that luck comes oftenest to those who deserve it.”⁵⁰

During his lifetime, the Ragged Dick series was the most popular “juvenile” Alger wrote and technically his only “best seller.” Oddly, though, Alger’s work was significantly more popular decades after his death in 1899. Alger, for example, estimated his total sales at about eight hundred thousand volumes, but by 1910, his novels were enjoying estimated annual sales of over one million. Gary Scharnhorst has attributed such a resurgence of popularity to an “intense nostalgia for an imaginary olden time of equal opportunity and equitable trade, because they satisfied the popular desire to reform institutions of business and government through a ‘return to fundamental morality.’”⁵¹ It’s also interesting to consider how much of this resurgence was due simply to a more defined and definable teen readership. Such a readership is evident in turn-of-the-century authors like Edward Stratemeyer, who made an industry out of adolescence. But Stratemeyer and Alger shared many things besides just an expanding teen market, as discussed in the next chapter.

NOTES

1. See John A. Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States*, vol 2: *The Expansion of an Industry, 1865-1919* (New York: R.R. Bowker, 1975); 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). For a discussion of literacy rates and their relationship with textbooks, newspapers, and children’s literature, see Lee Soltow, *The Rise of Literary and the Common School in the United States: A Socioeconomic Analysis to 1870* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

2. Madeleine B. Stern, ed., *Publishers for Mass Entertainment in Nineteenth Century America* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1980), xii. See also Raymond H. Shove, *Cheap Book Production in the United States, 1870-1891* (Urbana: University of Illinois Library, 1937).

3. Vicki Anderson, *The Dime Novel in Children’s Literature* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005), 4; Gail Schmunk Murray, *American Children’s Literature and the Construction of Childhood* (New York: Twayne, 1998), 81; Kenneth C. Donelson and Alleen Pace Nilsen, eds., *Literature for Today’s Young Adults* (Boston: Pearson, 2004), 54. See also Anne Scott MacLeod, *American Childhood: Essays on Children’s Literature of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994).

4. Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (New York: Verso, 1987), 30, 27.

5. Quoted in Jack Salzman, “Literature for the Populace,” in *Columbia Literary History of the United States*, ed. Emory Elliott (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 552.

6. Denning, *Mechanic Accents*, 51.

7. Beverly Lyon Clark, *Kiddie Lit: The Cultural Construction of Children’s Literature in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 74.

8. For a full discussion of Alger’s relationship to the dime novel, see Gary Scharnhorst, *Horatio Alger, Jr.* (Boston: Twayne, 1980). Alger is discussed by both Vicki Anderson and Michael Denning in their treatments of the dime novels.

9. Gary Scharnhorst, *The Lost Life of Horatio Alger, Jr.* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 62.

10. The six volumes in the Ragged Dick series are *Ragged Dick; or, Street Life in New York with the Bootblacks* (Boston: Loring, 1868; repr., New York: Macmillan, 1962); *Fame and Fortune; or, The Progress of Richard Hunter* (Boston: Loring, 1868; repr., Philadelphia: Pavilion, 2003); *Mark, the Match Boy; or, Richard Hunter’s Ward* (Boston: Loring, 1869; repr., New York: Macmillan, 1962); *Rough and Ready or, Life among the New York Newsboys* (Boston: Loring, 1869; repr., Philadelphia: Pavilion, 2003); *Ben the Luggage Boy or, Among the Wharves* (Boston: Loring, 1870; repr., Philadelphia: Pavilion, 2003); and *Rufus and Rose or, The Fortunes of Rough and Ready* (Boston: Loring, 1870; repr., Philadelphia: Pavilion, 2003). Textual references in this chapter are keyed to the reprints, which use the original text published by Loring. Note that Macmillan published *Ragged Dick* and *Mark, the Match Boy* together in a single volume.

11. See, for example, *Ben the Luggage Boy*, 80, and *Rough and Ready*, 59. Actually three dozen of Alger’s novels, most of which appeared prior to 1880, refer to the Children’s Aid Society, Brace, or the lodge. See Scharnhorst, *Horatio Alger, Jr.*, 105.

12. Stephen O’Connor, *Orphan Trains: The Story of Charles Loring Brace and the Children He Saved and Failed* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 80.

13. Charles Loring Brace, *The Dangerous Classes of New York and Twenty Years’ Work Among Them: Reprinted, with Original Illustrations from the Third Edition, 1880* (Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, 1967), 114.

14. Emma Brace, *The Life of Charles Loring Brace Told Chiefly in His Own Letters* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1894), 302.

15. Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (New York: George Braziller, 1959), 31. On Spencer’s

influence on American thought, see also Ronald E. Martin, *American Literature and the Universe of Force* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1981).

16. Brace, *The Dangerous Classes of New York*, 96.

17. *Ibid.*, 430.

18. The use of economic terminology can be seen in other areas of late nineteenth-century intellectual thought. Cynthia Eagle Russett, for example, has noted the use of such terminology in describing neurasthenic collapse. (*Sexual Science: The Victorian Construction of Womanhood* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1989), 116.

19. Carol Nackenoff, *The Fictional Republic: Horatio Alger and American Political Discourse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 34. For many years, and arguably still today, Alger's work has been viewed in the popular consciousness as a celebration of laissez-faire economics and an apologia for the myth of capitalist success. This mythology has been questioned by many critics, who have demonstrated that rather than promising "riches" to their boy readers, Alger's texts offer the prospect of a middle-class respectability. Similarly, the competition that is said to reward hard work and "pluck" is often complicated by patronage and just plain luck. For some key voices in the revisionary history of Alger, see Nackenoff's book as well as John G. Cawelti's chapter on Alger in his book *Apostles of the Self-Made Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965); Gary Scharnhorst's biography *Horatio Alger, Jr.*; Michael Denning's *Mechanic Accents*.

20. Horatio Alger, Jr., "The Newsboys' Lodging-House," *Liberal Christian*, April 20, 1867: 6.

21. Alger, *Fame and Fortune*, xiii.

22. Alger, *Ragged Dick*, 43.

23. Alger, *Ben the Luggage Boy*, 169.

24. Alger, *Mark, the Match Boy*, 256.

25. Michael Moon, "'The Gentle Boy from the Dangerous Classes': Pederasty, Domesticity, and Capitalism in Horatio Alger," *Representations* 19 (Summer 1987): 101.

26. Alger, *Mark, the Match Boy*, 361. The phenomenon of the "Orphan Trains" is turned into an entire novel in *Julius; or, The Street Boy Out West* (1874), where Julius is selected by the Children's Aid Society to be resettled on a farm in Wisconsin.

27. Alger, *Rough and Ready*, 27.

28. Alger, *Ragged Dick*, 133, 167; Alger, *Fame and Fortune*, 101.

29. Alger, *Mark, the Match Boy*, 300.

30. Scharnhorst, *Horatio Alger, Jr.*, 88.

31. Alger, *Ben the Luggage Boy*, 31.

32. Alger, *Ragged Dick*, 55.

33. *Ibid.*, 40, 55, 148; Alger, *Fame and Fortune*, 116. In volume 4, *Rough and Ready*, Rufus is described as "stoutly built, with a clear, fresh complexion, and a resolute, good-humored face" (29). In volume 5, *Ben the Luggage Boy*, Ben is said to have "a pleasant face, and would be considered good-looking" (31). Rufus retains his good looks when he returns in volume 6, *Rufus and Rose*, where he is described as a "stout, well-grown boy of fifteen, with a pleasant face" (23).

34. Alger, *Ragged Dick*, 175, 181.

35. *Ibid.*, 92, 94.

36. Alger, *Mark, the Match Boy*, 245; Alger, *Rough and Ready*, 105; Alger, *Rufus and Rose*, 92.

37. Alger, *Mark, the Match Boy*, 314.

38. Alger, *Fame and Fortune*, 80.

39. Alger, *Ragged Dick*, 122.

40. Carol Nackenoff has made the interesting observation that such access was actually quite at odds with how most youth were employed in the late nineteenth century. She points out: "All [Alger's] boys find employment in the white-collar workforce though less than 20% of all workers are so employed by 1900. Boys are found earning at the high end of the scales for average weekly adult earnings during this period." Nackenoff makes the point that such access was becoming less commonplace in the new, "modern" industrial order — as such, Alger's work demonstrates a kind of nostalgia. See "Of Factories and Failures: Exploring the Invisible Factory Gates of Horatio Alger, Jr.," *Journal of Popular Culture* 25, no.4 (1992): 63-80.

41. Alger, *Ragged Dick*, 130, 166.

42. Nackenoff, *The Fictional Republic*, 138.

43. Alger, *Fame and Fortune*, 31.

44. Alger, *Ragged Dick*, 89.

45. See, for example, references to Dick's opposition to stealing in *ibid.*, 39, 44, 86, and *Fame and Fortune*, 101; references to Rufus not being tempted to steal in *Rough and Ready*, 77; and Ben's resistance to stealing in *Ben the Luggage Boy*, 63.

46. Alger, *Ragged Dick*, 147.

47. *Ibid.*, 193.

48. See, for example, Aaron Shaheen's interesting discussion of luck in her [sic] article "Endless Frontiers and Emancipation from History: Horatio Alger's Reconstruction of Place and Time in *Ragged Dick*," *Children's Literature* 33 (2005): 20-40.

49. Alger, *Ragged Dick*, 210, 214.

50. Alger, *Fame and Fortune*, 156.

51. Scharnhorst, *The Lost Life of Horatio Alger, Jr.*, 149, 150.

Portsmouth welcomes Horatio Alger Society

(Continued from Page 3)

a few days after the convention!

In the three previous issues of *Newsboy* we have mentioned many places of interest just minutes from the Portsmouth Holiday Inn. One of the most spectacular is the Strawberry Banke Museum, a “living” complex of 42 restored 17th and 18th century homes, gardens and commercial buildings. I listed the museum’s Web site in the last issue but inadvertently misspelled “Strawbery”

as “Strawberry,” which means you may not have been able to log on. The correct URL is www.strawberrybanke.org, which has everything you want to know, including a map of the museum complex in .pdf format, along with complete information about admission fees and hours. The museum, which includes a gift shop, is staffed with colonial-dressed re-enactors who will fill you

in on the history and traditions of the early settlers in this New England seacoast city.

More information about Strawberry Banke, the Isles of Shoals and Portsmouth Harbor boat cruises, the nearby factory outlet shops in Kittery, Maine, and the many other local attractions, will be included with your registration materials when you stop by the H.A.S. hospitality suite upon arrival.

The hospitality suite will officially open at 1 p.m. Thursday, May 13; it will be in lower level conference rooms 1 and 2. If you can’t find it, just ask at the hotel registration desk.

The Portsmouth Holiday Inn is at 300 Woodbury Avenue, at Exit 6 off Interstate 95. If you are traveling north from Boston and points south, turn right at the end of the ramp and just go a short distance, and you’ll spot the hotel on the right.

As is traditional, we have dinner on our own on Thursday. One of our important “operations” on Thursday evening is the collection of books and other items you have brought for our annual auction, which we need to log into the computer spreadsheet. We

can’t wait until Friday afternoon’s auction to do this, so if you have items with you, let somebody know as soon as you arrive in the hospitality suite.

In case you don’t have the schedule of events handy (the orange sheet enclosed with the two previous issues), note that our official program starts promptly at 9 a.m. Friday in the Wentworth Room. Following opening remarks by convention host Art Young and Acting President Bob Sipes, we’ll have presentations by Brad

Chase (“Hurst project update”), Art Young on “George Leonard Chaney, et al: A Rediscovered Nineteenth Century Perspective,” and by Bill Gowen on “Walter Prichard Eaton: Essayist, Drama Critic and Author of Books for Boys.”

The annual business meeting is scheduled to start at 10:45 a.m., followed by the annual donation and consignment auction, with a noon

break for lunch — all events in the Wentworth Room.

As soon as the auction wraps up (hopefully by 3:30 p.m.) there will be free time for shopping, heading to Strawberry Banke, or book-hunting. At 5:45 p.m., we’ll meet in the lobby to set up car pools for the drive to Newicks for a New England seafood dinner (you can order your favorite entrée off the menu).

As per tradition, the hospitality suite will be open following our return from dinner, until 11 p.m.

The Saturday events include the annual book sale at 9 a.m. followed by a wrapup of the auction (if necessary), clearing the decks for lunch on our own and then car pools for the trip to Pat and Art’s open house in nearby Durham (1:45 to 4 p.m.)

Back at the Holiday Inn, the annual banquet will start at 6:30 p.m., featuring the annual **Strive and Succeed Award** to an area high school student, along with the H.A.S. awards. The guest speaker will be renowned author and bibliophile Nicholas Basbanes, a longtime friend of the Horatio Alger Society.

Hopefully, the spring weather will cooperate, and we’ll have a memorable convention!



The historic White Island Lighthouse remains a beacon of safety at Isles of Shoals, just off the coast of Portsmouth, N.H.

BOOK REVIEW

Peter C. Walther, ed.: *The Lost Works of Oliver Optic* — Volume 1: *Trials and Triumphs: The Adventures of Paul Clifford*. First edition, 207 pages, with Foreword by Robert E. Kasper and Introduction and notes by Peter C. Walther. Machias, NY: Tumbleby & Coombs, 2009. Copyright 2009 by Peter C. Walther. Illustrated; softcover. \$19, plus \$5 first class postage and handling. Order directly from www.oliver-optic.com

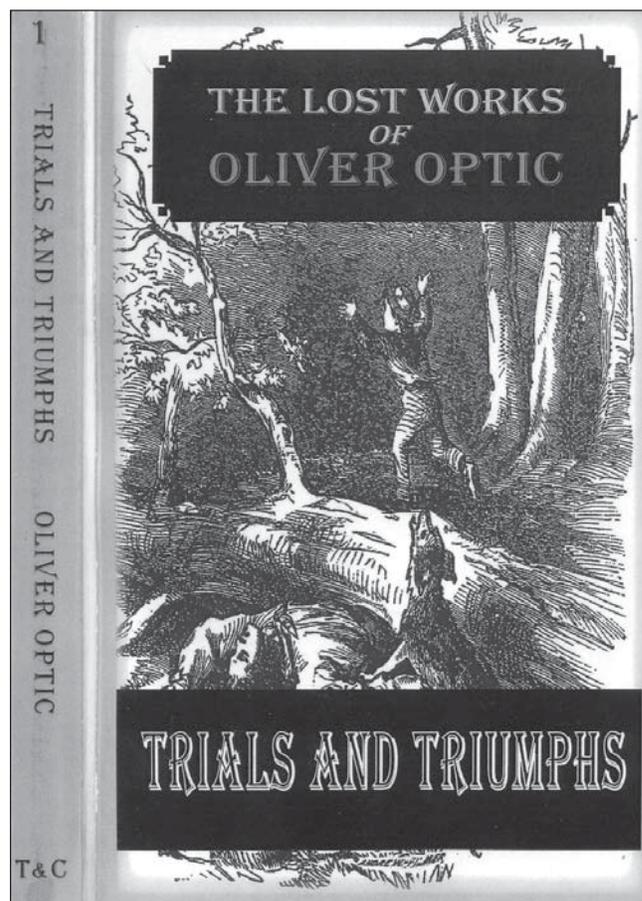
Reviewed by William R. Gowen (PF-706)

This review of *Trials and Triumphs*, the first in a projected series titled *The Lost Works of Oliver Optic* edited by Peter C. Walther (PF-548), has an interesting back-story, so I ask your indulgence for a personal reminiscence. As a longtime collector of the books of Edward Stratemeyer and the Stratemeyer Syndicate, this writer came late to the works of "Oliver Optic," Oh, I knew he was really William T. Adams (1822-1897), and his major publisher, Lee and Shepard of Boston, was also closely connected with Stratemeyer. But I did not buy any Oliver Optic books because I felt they came from an earlier generation of writers for boys, outside my collecting field at the time.

But one day while on summer vacation, I stopped by a longtime upstate New York bookseller, from whom I had been buying for my collection since college. Anyway, he said, "I've got some Optics out back, and if you'll buy them by the box, they're 50 cents apiece." I just couldn't pass up a deal that good, and soon my car was filled with complete runs of the *Starry Flag Series*, *Onward and Upward Series* and the two *Young America Abroad Series*, along with other titles, all in the early decorated green bindings with gold lettering. Because of a lack of shelf space, they went into storage.

But then, in the early 1980s I met Peter Walther, who I soon learned had a passion for Adams and his work. I found that "Oliver Optic" had written well over 100 books for boys, also editing his own periodical *Oliver Optic's Magazine: Our Boys and Girls*, for publisher Lee & Shepard. Over the years, Peter kept telling me more and more about Optic, and finally I asked him to name a title for me to try out. He suggested *Haste and Waste*, the final volume of the *Woodville Stories*. He chose wisely, because this tale of teen-age steamboat pilot Lawry Wilford and his adventures (not all of them pleasant) on Lake Champlain caught my attention right away. I was hooked, and soon I was eagerly adding more Optics to my collection.

The volume under review here collects five stories originally published in *Student and Schoolmate*,



including four entries in the "Paul Clifford Stories," a little-known saga of a boy who, in true Horatio Alger fashion, rises from hardscrabble orphan to success in life through hard work and industriousness. The stories are "Live and Learn" (January-June 1863), "Onward and Upward" (July-December 1863), "Trials and Triumphs" (January-June 1864) and "Work and Play" (July-December 1864). "Trials and Triumphs" is also used as the overall title of Walther's 207-page volume. These four stories are real page-turners, and they form a nice cohesive whole. The end of the Paul Clifford saga awaits the next volume of the "Lost Works" series.

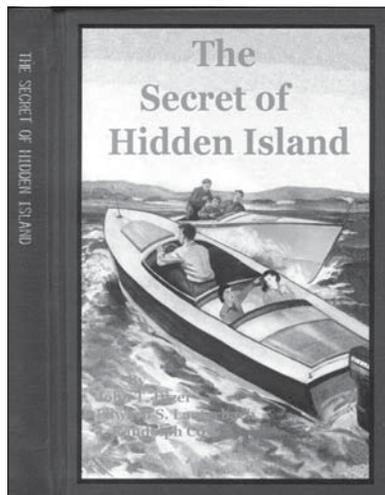
As a change of pace and to fill out this volume, Walther has added an interesting seven-part educational article, "The Magic Lantern," in which a fictional patriarch named Mr. Stuart uses as a teaching text for his three children. Three dozen engravings illuminate "The Magic Lantern," while the Paul Clifford stories are also illustrated.

The book is elegantly reproduced in facsimile from the *Student and Schoolmate* pages, and is sturdily bound in softcover. The \$24 price (including first-class postage) is a real bargain, and I highly recommend adding this well-crafted volume to your collection.

The Adventure Continues . . .

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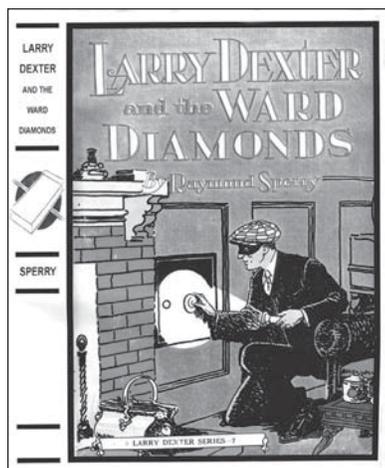
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