

*DADDY'S COME HOME:*  
FATHERHOOD AND EVANGELICALISM IN RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY  
PUBLICATIONS, 1879-1889

by

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## ABSTRACT

Religious Tract Society's (RTS) publications for boys and for families, the *Boy's Own Paper*, *The Leisure Hour* and *The Sunday at Home*, reveal many of the efforts of Evangelical members of the middle class to counter the subversive influences of the *fin de siècle*. Through an examination of the changing portrayal of father figures in its stories, this paper argues that the Society was responding to contemporary socio-cultural and religious concerns. There are three major types of fatherhood displayed in these publications. A new version of the Trinity - the heavenly Father, the earthly father and the surrogate father - served as a powerful discursive weapon in the effort to maintain religious adherence and societal and familial continuity. It also argues that the Society while recognizing the value of women's moral guidance emphasised, as in earlier generations, men's, and specifically, fathers' primary moral and educational role in the family.

Fictional stories and some non-fictional accounts found in these publications between 1879-1889 provide access to this older version of Evangelical domesticated masculinity and romanticized Christian manliness. This paper highlights an important minoritarian Victorian religious construction of masculinity largely ignored by historians who have focused their studies on dominant secular versions of imperial and muscular masculinity. More precisely, this paper demonstrates that the RTS offered a challenge to dominant British ideologies of masculinity. The religious ideal advocated by members of the RTS persisted alongside and in opposition to the newer constructions of imperial and muscular masculinity.

This paper also begins to address the issue of how constructs of fatherhood were built up during boyhood through *The Leisure Hour* and *The Sunday at Home*, but especially through the *Boy's Own Paper*. For the members of the Religious Tract Society, the formation of masculinity for middle-class boys included expectations of their development as independent, self-sufficient men, able to perpetuate and strengthen their middle-class values and standing, while emphasising the preservation of traditional Evangelical values.

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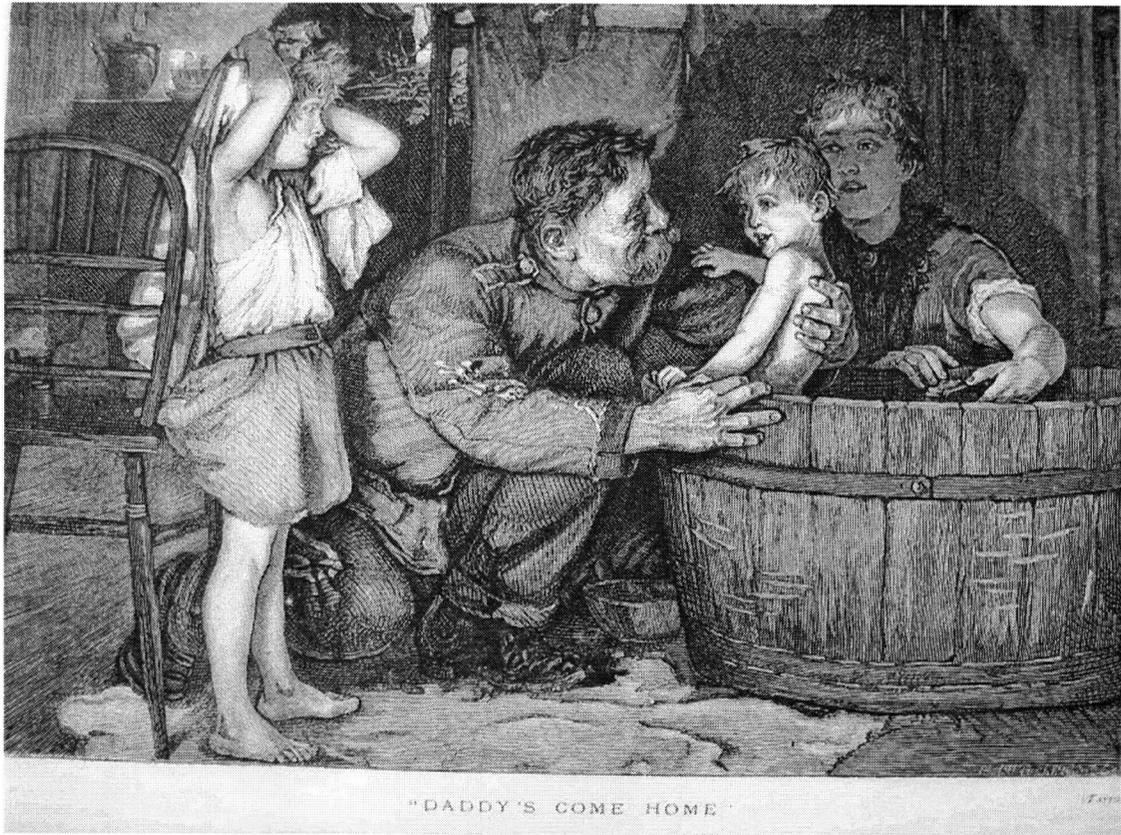
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Frontispiece "Daddy's Come Home" (*The Leisure Hour*, 1885: 74.)

Far-reaching as the earth's remotest span,  
Wide spread as ocean foam,  
One thought is sacred in the breast of man –  
It is the thought of home.

That little word his human fate shall bind  
With destinies above,  
For there the home of immortal mind  
Is in God's wider love.<sup>1</sup>

This poem, entitled “Home,” embodies the Evangelical Christian values that the Religious Tract Society (RTS) promoted in its publications for families and boys. Among these, the centrality of fatherhood to the preservation of both traditional forms of family and of morality and religion, figures prominently. These verses demonstrate that no matter how embroiled man is in other, more worldly pursuits, home remains sacred, the bridge to God, both in this world and the next. As the *fin de siècle* neared, this “traditional” institution was believed by many Victorians to be increasingly under attack.

Christianity, which attempted to control and guide those members of society apparently most susceptible to moral damage, was presumed to be the best safeguard against any catastrophic erosion of moral standards. Until the last decades of the nineteenth century, the idea of patriarchy was strongly adhered to by many Britons, as a means of maintaining societal order. In the seventeenth century, Sir Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha* captured the dominant view: from the king to common fathers, God had intended authority to be transmitted from the father to the rest of the family. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Evangelicalism preserved patriarchy in its insistence on the primacy of religious concerns on reform from top to bottom of society and emphasis on the God-given individualistic authority of the father to ensure spiritual and moral good

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<sup>1</sup> “Home,” *The Sunday at Home Annual* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1882) 409.

order.<sup>2</sup> An illustration in the 1879 Annual of *The Sunday at Home*, “Going to Church with Papa,” (figure 1), which was taken “from an old picture,” reminded late-nineteenth-century readers of the traditional Evangelical role of the father as spiritual and moral head of the family. This father and his daughter, who seem warm and affectionate toward each other, are walking to church together, without the presence of the child’s mother. In the mid-nineteenth century the Broad Church, Christian Socialist, muscular Christianity of Thomas Arnold of Rugby and his followers had presented a more earthly, collectivist view of Christianity which saw the playing fields of Rugby and other elite schools as male training grounds of a kingdom and an Empire. This version of muscular and imperial masculinity de-emphasised fatherhood and gave priority to men’s physical prowess and individual worth. Yet many traditional and religious Evangelicals fought to preserve their long-held view of domestic masculinity which included their patriarchally based view of fatherhood.

At this time a greater number of women was making forays into a wider world. Judith Rowbotham argues that “in order to ensure the continuance of secular and spiritual civilization in Britain, women had to continue to play a central role as well as being properly trained to undertake their vast, and increasing, responsibilities.”<sup>3</sup> Women’s moral leadership was believed to be more essential than ever before, since men, the traditional moral heads of the family, no longer could be counted on to fulfil that role. Feminism was viewed by many as challenges to the traditional institutions of marriage, work and the family. In the 1880s, moreover, feminist reform legislation, as Peter Gay

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<sup>2</sup> For an important discussion of Evangelical fatherhood in the American context, please see Philip Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977).

<sup>3</sup> Judith Rowbotham, *Good Girls Make Good Wives: Guidance for Girls in Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989) 98.

notes, “began to dismantle England’s time-honored patriarchal system.”<sup>4</sup> By the beginning of the 1890s, the system of patriarchy and the family was under attack not only by women, but also by an avant-garde of male artists, sexual radicals and intellectuals, who challenged its class structures and roles, its system of inheritance and primogeniture, its cultural authority and its compulsory heterosexuality and marriage.<sup>5</sup> According to Claudia Nelson, however, the increasing recognition of women’s sexuality and the emergence of a new definition (and condemnation) of homosexuality demanded a much sharper contrast between manliness and femininity. She rightly points out that “the ‘manly boy,’ once a highly religious, *morally* courageous, but often physically frail creature, became the athletic, impetuous daredevil hero of late-Victorian and Edwardian boys’ adventure stories.”<sup>6</sup> The *Boy’s Own Paper* (*BOP*) is an important historiographical source of those boys’ adventure stories. Most historians have not acknowledged, however, that the *BOP* is an RTS paper, published with similar Evangelical objectives to its other publications. In the first ten years of the *BOP* the central goal of RTS members was the correct moral instruction of boys, while cautious not to appear overtly didactic. Many stories featured adventure-seeking and athletic heroes which served to attract the juvenile readers to the paper’s religious and moral messages.

For the members of the Religious Tract Society, the formation of masculinity for middle-class boys included the dominant societal expectations of their development as independent, self-sufficient men, able to perpetuate and strengthen their middle-class

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<sup>4</sup> Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984) 175.

<sup>5</sup> Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Viking, 1990) 11.

<sup>6</sup> Claudia Nelson, *Boys Will Be Girls: The Feminine Ethic and British Children’s Fiction, 1857-1917* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991) 28-55.

values and standing, while preserving traditional Evangelical values. While recognizing the merit of women's moral guidance the Society as in earlier generations continued to emphasize, men's, and specifically, fathers' primary moral and educational role in the family. This role was particularly crucial toward the end of the century, as it could prevent the moral decline which resulted from attacks on the traditional structure of the family. Using the example of Religious Tract Society publications for boys and for families, this study of the older version of Evangelical domesticated masculinity highlights a Victorian construction largely ignored by historians who have focused their studies on the more secular imperial version of masculinity. By examining the changing portrayal of father figures in RTS stories, this paper stresses that the Society was responding to contemporary socio-cultural and religious concerns and providing a critique of more dominant contemporary versions of masculinity, while continuing to promote the model of manhood and fatherhood it had advocated since its establishment at the end of the eighteenth century. The religious ideal advocated by members of the RTS persisted alongside and in opposition to the newer constructions of imperial and muscular masculinity. In fact, the RTS offered an important challenge to newly dominant British ideologies of masculinity.

As the end of the century drew nearer, many Britons grew increasingly concerned about threats to the *status quo*. Religious Tract Society publications for boys and for families in the last decades of the nineteenth century revealed many of the efforts of the middle class to counter the subversive influences of the *fin de siècle*. Three RTS publications will be carefully examined: *The Sunday at Home*, *The Leisure Hour*, both family publications, and the *Boy's Own Paper (BOP)*, directed specifically at boys. In

the *BOP*'s later years, moral education would be overshadowed by purely entertaining stories reflecting more secular and imperial varieties of masculinity. While most studies examine this later period, this paper focuses on the first ten years of the *BOP* (1879-1889), in order to bring out the ways in which this early period was different and significant. The decade was marked by growing apprehensiveness and flux, leading to the culturally tumultuous final decade of the nineteenth century. In the religious sphere, Evangelicalism became more defensive in trying to preserve its moral and societal authority. During this time, the Society continued to emphasise the centrality of the father's role in the family, the focus of the first part of this paper. The second part deals with the *BOP* as a special case to show the importance members of the RTS placed in providing boys with a proper literary guide for their moral upbringing so that they themselves might grow up to become fathers in the Evangelical model.

One of the most well-known images of Evangelical fatherhood is the grim tale of a stern and strictly religious father and his stifled son recounted by Edmund Gosse in his *Father and Son*. But this does not provide us with the complete image of Evangelical parenting which historians usually, and misleadingly, drawn from this kind of source. Religious Tract Society writings provide us with a richer and different picture. For RTS authors, tenderness and familial love were within the reach of the Victorian male. The growing separation of home from work is often assumed to have reduced the father to a marginal figure, in John Gillis' phrase, "a worldly stranger to domestic life."<sup>7</sup> Yet, both discursively and in practice, manhood and fatherhood were inseparable constructions. More precisely, late-Victorian masculinity still involved a kind of fatherhood that was

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<sup>7</sup> John R. Gillis, 'Gender and Fertility Decline Among the British Middle Classes', *The European Experience of Declining Fertility*, eds. J.R. Gillis, L.A. Tilly and D. Levine (Blackwell, Oxford, 1992) 43.

actively self-replicating in the next generation. As women's roles expanded, men's changing positions became a source of anxiety. Opportunities to succeed at home and in the Empire were not always abundant; the stresses of maintaining an external mask of confidence and strength led to nervous disorders, such as neurasthenia; suppressing "feminine" feelings of nurturance and affection also created problems for many men. According to Elaine Showalter, "what was most alarming to the *fin de siècle* was that sexuality and sex roles might no longer be contained in the neat and permanent borderlines of gender categories."<sup>8</sup>

What we might call "domestic masculinity" became vulnerable to new trends in Britain and abroad, just as organized religions, both Nonconformist and Church of England, were increasingly concerned with dwindling church attendance and with fewer outward signs of piety. In Lambeth, for example, morning church attendance had fallen from 17.2 percent of the population in 1852 to 11.7 percent in 1886-88.<sup>9</sup> Although Callum Brown's recent study of secularization in Britain stresses that church attendance rates were grossly underestimated, he also notes that the perceived decline in religious adherence was a major cause of alarm.<sup>10</sup> A generation earlier fathers would have been expected to lead their families spiritually and morally; the RTS publications, through their stories of family life, emphasized the importance of this paternal role. "Proper" fatherly behaviour was not, however, now assumed to occur automatically, as it had been earlier in the century. These stories cautioned readers of the dangers of fathers not carrying on this moral role, and of the necessity of finding substitutes where fathers were

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<sup>8</sup> Showalter, 9.

<sup>9</sup> Jeffrey Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth, 1870-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) 22.

<sup>10</sup> Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800-2000* (London: Routledge, 2001) 148.

absent, either physically or spiritually. So, for example, in some stories, women are represented as the new moral centres of the family. But within the context of these Evangelical publications, women assume these roles only when the men who should rightfully fill them fail to do so. These stories are thus cautionary tales calling men to come back to their central role in the family.

The Religious Tract Society responded to societal threats and to the more dominant varieties of imperial and muscular masculinity by actively asserting its traditional Evangelical view of the family, especially its focus on the father. In keeping with patriarchal attitudes, which since their seventeenth-century theoretical initiation had seen God the Father as the earthly father's model and authority, there are three major tropes of fatherhood displayed in these publications. In effect, this was a new version of the Trinity - the heavenly Father, the earthly father and the surrogate father – which served as a powerful discursive weapon in the effort to maintain religious adherence and societal and familial continuity. The presence of the heavenly Father in *The Sunday at Home* and *The Leisure Hour* as well as in *The Boy's Own Paper*, emphasised the role of religion in the family. God is also the supreme father, always watchful over the family and ready to support the earthly father's moral and educational role as head of the family. Furthermore, God is also the ultimate surrogate father, children's essential spiritual guide. As the impact of imperial manhood was increasingly felt, He represents the opposition to men's perceived increasing distance from the family and provided a template for fathers who modelled themselves after the characteristics of evangelical manhood and active fatherhood.<sup>11</sup> The earthly father, mainly present in the two family periodicals, is brought

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<sup>11</sup> Please see Meredith Veldman, "Dutiful Daughter vs. All-Boy: Jesus, Gender, and the Secularization of Victorian Society," *Nineteenth Century Studies* 11 (1997): 1-24; and Peter Gay, "The Manliness of Christ,"

to the fore in family fictional serial stories, some biographies and in non-fictional accounts. Surrogate fathers are also found in *The Leisure Hour* and *The Sunday at Home* - men who fill the gap left by physically or emotionally absent fathers. These could be eldest sons, other male family members, or men with spiritual authority, such as clergymen or school masters. In part, this version of the surrogate father provided a critique of the father, emphasising the perceived inadequacies of late nineteenth century fatherhood. While the first part of this paper deals mainly with the Religious Tract Society material for the entire family, the second part discusses the *Boy's Own Paper*, directed just at boys. In the *BOP*, another version of the surrogate father, represented by schoolmasters and the publications themselves, is found mainly in public school stories or in other fictional or non-fictional articles. These stories demonstrate the didactic role of the periodical in teaching boys their obligations as future fathers to maintain traditional family structures and counteract the perceived subversive decline of values and of religious adherence, and assaults upon the family.

### **The Religious Tract Society**

For some historians, the whole religious history of the Victorian era is dominated by the theme of secularization. Alan Gilbert, who makes the clearest case for this interpretation, argues that the "religious boom" belonged essentially to the first half of the nineteenth century, when membership of Nonconformist chapels saw spectacular growth, and that by 1850 the peak of religious influence in English society had already been

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*Religion and Irreligion in Victorian Society*, eds. R.W. Davis and R.J. Helmstadter. (London: Routledge, 1992) 102-116.

passed.<sup>12</sup> Among the chief critics of this view is Jeffrey Cox, who believes that the Victorian religious crisis came later, during the period 1890 to 1914.<sup>13</sup> For the purposes of this paper, this decline is important, since many contemporaries equated decreasing church attendance with the waning religiosity and morality symptomatic of the modernization of the latter part of the nineteenth century. Cox rejects the connection between secularization and ‘modernization,’ as does Callum Brown in the most recent study on this subject. Brown sees a high level of religiosity, which he argues was primarily dependent on women, as lasting until the 1960s.

Hugh McLeod concurs with those historians who have identified the period 1890-1914 as the one in which there was a “general *consciousness* of religious crisis”, but he also agrees with those who have argued that the roots of the crisis lay in an earlier period, and that in looking at the various causes of the crisis it is not possible to concentrate on this period alone. This crisis had at least three partly independent dimensions: the growth of unbelief or doubt, mainly after about 1860; the decline in church membership and attendance, mainly after about 1890; and a weakening of the social role of religion, which was a much more gradual and long-drawn-out process, affecting different areas of life at different times.<sup>14</sup>

Though historians disagree about secularization theory, it is clear that many Britons at the *fin-de-siècle* were concerned about declines in religious adherence, especially in church attendance and piety, and the consequent effect on morality and on the family. The Religious Tract Society was a prime location for these kinds of concerns.

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<sup>12</sup> Alan D. Gilbert. *The Making of Post-Christian Britain: A History of the Secularization of Modern Society*. (London: Longman, 1980).

<sup>13</sup> Cox does see the beginning of a real decline in churchgoing and piety starting in the 1880s. Cox, 272-273.

<sup>14</sup> Hugh McLeod, *Religion and Society in England, 1850-1914* (London: MacMillan, 1996) 223.

The RTS was a product of the Evangelical Revival which had begun in the mid eighteenth century. Evangelicalism was a social as well as a religious movement, concerned with ensuring real rather than formal Christianity through individual conversion. Like the other major organizations of the evangelical movement, the RTS, a widespread nondenominational society throughout Britain and in missions around the world, was created to disseminate spiritually improving literature to an expanding audience of Christians and the “unconverted.” The Society’s founder, The Rev. George Burder of Coventry, had written several tracts of a practical, evangelical tone. At the London Missionary Society’s Anniversary meeting in 1799, Burder proposed the establishment of a non-sectarian society for the preparation and circulation of evangelical tract literature. To that end, the Religious Tract Society committee was formed, consisting of twelve members, both clerical and lay. According to the RTS own official history, published at the end of the nineteenth century, good tracts contained “pure truth,” “some account of the way of a sinner’s salvation,” and plain, striking, entertaining and idea-driven content. They should be adapted to various situations and conditions, “for the young and for the aged, for the children of prosperity and of affliction, for careless and for awakened sinners, and for entering into the reasonings, excuses, temptations, and duties of each, and pointing to the way of the Lord.”<sup>15</sup> In its first year, 1799-1800, the Religious Tract Society sold 200,000 tracts, a number which rose to 800,000 in the Society’s second year.<sup>16</sup> The RTS quickly expanded, publishing increasing numbers of books and periodicals, all with the same high moral tone. The Society also published a

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<sup>15</sup> Samuel G. Green, *The Story of the Religious Tract Society for One Hundred Years* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1899) 7.

<sup>16</sup> *An Account of the Origin and Progress of the London Religious Tract Society*, (London, 1803) 9 in Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, 49.

number of periodicals and many books issued by the Religious Tract Society appeared in one or other of these.

Throughout the 1850s, several cheap religious periodicals were established in an attempt to benefit from the growing family-reading market for weeklies.<sup>17</sup> Improving magazines, many of them published by the Religious Tract Society, dominated this market.<sup>18</sup> At mid-century, the RTS began publishing two penny weeklies, *The Leisure Hour* (1852-1908), and *The Sunday at Home* (1854-1940) both edited for many years by James Macaulay, with his colleague and successor, W. Stevens. According to the Society's late nineteenth-century chronicler, Samuel G. Green, the most important step in the provision of popular literature was the introduction of *The Leisure Hour*, a new weekly magazine which aimed to treat all topics of human interest "in the light of Christian truth."<sup>19</sup> Both magazines, as competitively priced cheap weeklies, sought to reach the widest audience possible, including most of the working class. The magazines were also issued in monthly parts for five pence each. With these two periodicals, the Society began to publish cheap religious periodicals for the popular, family weekly market, although a distinction between weekly and Sunday reading was maintained.<sup>20</sup> These publications were cheaper than their biggest secular competitors for readership. At twopence, Charles Dickens' weekly, *All the Year Round*, was double the price of the RTS family publications.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Josef Altholz, *The Religious Press in Britain, 1760-1900* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989) 39.

<sup>18</sup> Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, 54.

<sup>19</sup> Green, *The Story of the Religious Tract Society*, 73.

<sup>20</sup> Mark W. Turner, *Trollope and the Magazines: Gendered Issues in Mid-Victorian Britain* (London: MacMillan, 2000) 66.

<sup>21</sup> *All the Year Round: A Weekly Journal Conducted by Charles Dickens*, vol. XXIV (London: Charles Dickens & Evans, 1880) frontispiece.

By 1850 the fires of Evangelical enthusiasm burned less fiercely, but the cultural legacy of the movement remained powerful, particularly in the intertwining of Christian values and middle-class mores. Though less-improving magazines grew in number, especially from the 1890s, the bulk of the domestic literature of the British family remained strongly evangelical in origin at least until the 1910s.<sup>22</sup> Also, as late as 1890, the *Boy's Own Paper* continued to provide strongly evangelical messages of Christian purity.

*The Leisure Hour*, and even more *The Sunday at Home*, reflected the much larger sabbatarian movement, devoted to preserving Sunday as a day of rest and of religious observance. This movement was important for members of the RTS who wished to set aside Sunday as a day when fathers could abstain from work outside the home and spend time with their families, to combat the contemporary perception that fathers were increasingly becoming "strangers" in the home. The Religious Tract Society clearly targeted the family circle, as is indicated in its magazines' subtitles: *The Leisure Hour: A Family Journal of Instruction and Recreation* and *Sunday at Home: The Illustrated Family Magazine for Sabbath Reading*. Both periodicals often led with fiction, and included at least one large illustration in each issue. As a sabbath magazine, *Sunday at Home* was more sober in its presentation and contents than the weekly *Leisure Hour*, providing appropriate reading for all ages on the day of rest. This periodical was more overtly religious, but was still intended to be non-denominational.

Most aristocrats resisted militant sabbatarianism, and many members of the working class could not strictly adhere to it. But for the middle class, Sunday tended to be quiet, and at least an external observance of Sunday was regarded as a normal requirement of

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<sup>22</sup> Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, 54.

respectability.<sup>23</sup> By the 1880s, this was beginning to change. Gradually the taboos on Sunday recreation were being lifted. In London “Society,” Sunday dinner parties were becoming fashionable, and wealthy families with their own tennis courts and croquet lawns were beginning to ignore the ban on Sunday amusement.<sup>24</sup> The RTS began *The Sunday at Home* largely to provide wholesome reading for the Sabbath. Also, by providing entertaining family reading, it encouraged men to remain at home on Sunday with their families, instead of the often morally dubious activities of pub-going or the increasingly popular homo-social environment of the club. Though middle-class interest in sabbatarianism was waning by the 1880s, *The Sunday at Home* continued to be published since RTS members wished to preserve Sunday as a day of rest and family time in which the father could be an active participant.

By the end of the 1870s, The Religious Tract Society committee was also convinced of the need to provide improving literature for both boys and girls. The editors wanted “to render, without obtruding the moral, the vehicle of sound teaching.”<sup>25</sup> The Society had already published much juvenile literature, mostly of a fictional nature. In the 1879 Report, the committee expressed the urgency of creating a periodical specifically directed at boys:

The urgent need of such a periodical had been long and deeply felt. Juvenile crime was being largely stimulated by the pernicious literature circulated among our lads. Judges, magistrates, schoolmasters, prison chaplains, and others were deploring the existence of the evil, and calling loudly for a remedy, but none seemed to be forthcoming. The Committee, fully admitting the terrible necessity of a publication which might to some

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<sup>23</sup> John Wigley, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Sunday* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980) *passim*.

<sup>24</sup> McLeod, 199.

<sup>25</sup> Green, *The Story of the Religious Tract Society*, 126.

extent supplant those of a mischievous tendency, yet hesitated to enter upon the task.<sup>26</sup>

The Society believed that it was outside its scope of operations to produce a paper that was not largely religious in its teachings, yet acknowledged that an overtly religious periodical would do little to challenge the profusion of "Penny Dreadfuls" that had emerged after the 1870 Education Act had provided universal schooling.<sup>27</sup> It was hoped that private publishers might take on the task, but of these no one was willing to take the financial risk. "It was thus forced upon the Committee to attempt an enterprise from which others shrank" and the first edition of the *Boy's Own Paper* – a sixteen page and one penny weekly - appeared in 1879.<sup>28</sup>

### **Historiographical Survey**

Studies focusing on gender and religion in Britain are rare, but recently nineteenth-century Christianity and its ties to constructions of masculinity have received some attention. Meredith Veldman's "Dutiful Daughter Versus All-Boy: Jesus, Gender, and the Secularization of Victorian Society" utilises nineteenth-century descriptions of Jesus to access constructions of masculinity. Peter Gay's "The Manliness of Christ", his study of Thomas Hughes' 1879 work of the same name also argues that at the end of the nineteenth century, Christ became the model of a variety of masculinity which was both gentle and strong, demonstrating that the two characteristics were not incompatible. For

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<sup>26</sup> Green, *The Story of the Religious Tract Society*, 127.

<sup>27</sup> Kirsten Drotner, *English Children and Their Magazines, 1751-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988) 123.

<sup>28</sup> Green, *The Story of the Religious Tract Society*, 127.

Gay, Hughes saw Christ as the “incarnation of perfect manliness”.<sup>29</sup> “Manliness” has broader significance than “courage”. “Tenderness and thoughtfulness for others” are also included.<sup>30</sup> In this way, Muscular Christianity which united public school athleticism with Christian morality as a formula for the future rulers of a nation and an empire was wrong, as prowess in sports was a most unsatisfactory criterion for discovering manliness. Gay deems Hughes’ work to give “unexpected scope to the positive value of what is usually called the “feminine” element in a manly man’s character.”<sup>31</sup> Gay argues for the identification of tenderness with manliness in both Hughes and Charles Kingsley. Gay concludes that “no doubt, manliness was a quality far richer than we have long thought.”<sup>32</sup> This insight is essential for this study, as it recognizes that muscular Christianity and imperial masculinity did not completely dominate in this era, nor for many Christians, like Hughes and Kingsley, was it deemed desirable. The influence of the Broad-church Christian Socialists Hughes and Kingsley at least osmotically penetrated factional boundaries and influenced even Evangelicals. Ann Braude has argued in “Women’s History *Is* American Religious History” that for American men ideals of masculinity conflicted with Christian values. She affirms that “whether exemplifying manhood by competing in the marketplace, the battlefield, or the playing field, the goal for men was to win, not to offer examples of self-sacrificial love.”<sup>33</sup> In contrast, I would argue that evidence from RTS publications demonstrates that, at least discursively, this assertion is far from universally applicable. Rather, in contrast to

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<sup>29</sup> Peter Gay, “The Manliness of Christ,” *Religion and Irreligion in Victorian Society*, eds. R.W. Davis and R.J. Helmstadter. (London: Routledge, 1992) 104.

<sup>30</sup> Gay, “The Manliness of Christ,” 105.

<sup>31</sup> Gay, “The Manliness of Christ” 109.

<sup>32</sup> Gay, “The Manliness of Christ” 115.

<sup>33</sup> Ann Braude, “Women’s History *Is* American Religious History,” *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, ed. Thomas A. Tweed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) 104.

dominant secular understandings of masculinity, this paper demonstrates that a religious ideal of manliness persists alongside and in opposition to “imperial” and muscular varieties.

If gender and religion has been little studied, the topic of fatherhood and religion has received virtually no attention at all. In fact, fatherhood in general has mainly been examined tangentially, in studies of the history of the family.<sup>34</sup> Although recent works have begun to challenge this image, the image of the stern, distant patriarch still predominates in historical accounts. In his *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*, John Tosh provides a revised image of the Victorian father, showing how profoundly men's lives were conditioned by the Victorian ideal and how they negotiated its many contradictions. According to Tosh, “the nineteenth century witnessed both the climax of masculine domesticity and the first major reaction against it.”<sup>35</sup> Challenging the familiar definition of fatherhood in his examination of the British middle class, Tosh maintains that “fatherhood encompassed every variant from the almost invisible breadwinner to the accessible and attentive playmate.”<sup>36</sup> Tosh acknowledges that a substantial number of fathers followed the dictates of male domesticity, but he maintains that the late Victorian period, marked by contested masculinities in social, economic and sexual arenas, triggered in many men at least a temporary “flight from domesticity”<sup>37</sup>. By emphasising the “flight from domesticity” at

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<sup>34</sup> An important example of this is Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987).

<sup>35</sup> John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) 196.

<sup>36</sup> Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 195.

<sup>37</sup> Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 170.

the end of the nineteenth century, Tosh largely neglects the significant remnants of domesticated masculinity during this period.

The supposed “flight from domesticity” seems to have coincided with important changes in constructions of masculinity. John Springhall observes a basic shift in the concept of manliness in the second half of the nineteenth century. Based on his examination of juvenile literature, Springhall finds a definite transition from “strenuous moral earnestness” and religion in the earlier part of the century to a greater emphasis on athleticism and patriotism starting at mid-century.<sup>38</sup> Historians (like Springhall) have given a significant amount of attention in recent years to the subject of boys’ literature and popular imperialism. Those who have looked at the literature have found that boys’ books and periodicals in general, and the *BOP* more specifically, are without exception dedicated to the imperial idea.<sup>39</sup> The secondary sources on boys’ stories focus primarily on imperial and public school tales, to the exclusion of more home-centred themes. The evidence from the *BOP*, however, suggests that this shift to what is widely termed imperial manhood was not complete. The *BOP*’s first ten years have received relatively little concentrated attention. Evidence from RTS publications suggests that historians have placed too much emphasis on imperial manhood in this era. This study demonstrates that there are overt expositions of domesticated Evangelical and romanticized Christian

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<sup>38</sup> John Springhall, “Building Character in the British Boy: the Attempt to Extend Christian Manliness to Working-class Adolescents, 1880-1914,” *Manliness and Morality: Middle-class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940*, eds. J.A. Mangan and James Walvin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987) 61.

<sup>39</sup> Please see Patrick Dunae, “Boys’ Literature and the Idea of Empire, 1870-1914,” *Victorian Studies* 24 (Autumn 1980): 105-21 and Robert H. MacDonald, “Reproducing the Middle-Class Boy: From Purity to Patriotism in the Boys’ Magazines, 1892-1914,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 24 (1989): 519-39. Stories for boys throughout the period were generally concerned with reinforcing the established and little-questioned manly virtues and discouraging vice (such as sexual indulgence with either sex, cowardice, cheating and gambling). As Judith Rowbotham argues, they also contained little philosophical thought about the position in which these boys might find themselves as adult men. Consequently, according to Rowbotham, stories “concentrated on tales of adventure and the sound results of patriotism and quick-thinking”.<sup>39</sup> (Rowbotham, 7).

manliness in *The Leisure Hour* and *The Sunday at Home* and significant remnants even in the *BOP*.

Despite the focus on imperial masculinity in historiographical accounts, until the 1890s, the *Boy's Own Paper* continued to provide a strong evangelical message of Christian purity. It was hoped that boys would learn to take the right moral path toward manhood, before they might be led astray. Michael Roper and John Tosh, in *Manful Assertions*, argue that "one of the most precarious moments in the reproduction of masculinity is the transfer of power to the succeeding generation... The key question is whether the 'sons' take on the older generation's gender identity without question, or whether they mount a challenge, and if so how."<sup>40</sup> For Evangelicals, an important part of the male identity was piety and proper religious adherence. The RTS thus saw one of its crucial roles as educating boys to be the future moral and spiritual leaders of their families. This was in no way a certain goal in an age where many men were seen to be increasingly neglecting their duties toward their families. Yet the extent of male piety could best be judged in the familial context. There were no morally improving, religious-based popular journals solely for men; explorations of male piety were only to be found in the context of magazines for families or for children. According to Callum Brown, these were "truly exploratory of male religiosity, for it was in men's relations to the family that the key to issues of their piety and impiety lay."<sup>41</sup> In the case of the family magazine, its form of multiple readership promoted men's piety in a familial context. Its form, therefore, was as important in promoting evangelical values as its content.

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<sup>40</sup>Michael Roper and John Tosh, eds., *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800*. (London: Routledge, 1991) 17.

<sup>41</sup> Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, 113.

Another question central to studies of fatherhood is the transfer of paternal models to the next generation. Contemporary authors recognized that this was a difficult task. In an article entitled "Parents and Children", the Rev. Canon Garbett "consider[s] the mode in which parents should treat sons the most difficult and embarrassing question that enters into all Christian experience."<sup>42</sup> As Tosh and Roper have pointed out, the transference of masculinity from father to son is precarious.<sup>43</sup> Among the bourgeoisie, there was an ongoing desire to preserve and enhance family status; it is clear that masculine influences were important in this effort. Though there were conflicting and competing perceptions of the paternal role, in discourse and in practice, fathers commonly understood that their sons should be raised to reflect and to perpetuate their class. The education of boys and their culturization in relation to their manly, familial responsibilities have as yet received little study. While the study of fatherhood is nascent, treatment of the raising of boys to be fathers is in its proto-stage. John Tosh has suggested that boys were pressed to break with their mothers' influence in order to become men, capable of becoming heads of households.<sup>44</sup> This was frequently accomplished by the teaching of behavioural norms and liberal values at boarding schools. These, however, were often perceived to be morally dubious and in opposition to traditional domesticated manly values.

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<sup>42</sup> "Parents and Children," *The Sunday at Home Annual* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1882) 744.

<sup>43</sup> Roper and Tosh, *Manful Assertions*, 17.

<sup>44</sup> John Tosh, "Authority and Nurture in Middle-Class Fatherhood: The Case of Early and Mid-Victorian England," *Gender & History* 8.1 (1996) 55.

### **Faith and Fatherhood**

Members of the Religious Tract Society perceived a societal need to reinforce traditional Evangelical values, putting fathers at the moral and educational centre of the family. In RTS family stories, young men return from abroad to be with family or to start their own. They are not usually engaged in long-term homosocial activities, at the expense of their interactions with women and children. Furthermore, on the first page of almost every story in which the central character is a boy, the formula is a description of the child, then a description of the father and his occupation. Thus the father invariably figures prominently in these stories. Yet his central importance is not always due to the positive effects of his presence within the family. It is often his physical or emotional absence that marks his relationship with his son and the rest of his family.

One serial story will be examined in detail, as it echoes many of the themes surrounding traditional Evangelical views on fatherhood and its ties to religion discussed in this paper. “Kathleen: The Story of a Home”, in the 1882 Annual of *The Sunday at Home*, (figure 2), is a tale about overcoming damaging personal emotions and obeying God’s will. This story provides a clear example of what an adequate male centre of the family should look like, while juxtaposing this ideal father with an example of a real, but inadequate father. Inadequate female replacements and surrogate fathers also figure prominently in this, as in many other, RTS stories.

Mrs. Joliffe, the mother and centre of her family, is dying of consumption and is preoccupied with ensuring her replacement before her death. She tries to mould her

slightly immature daughter Kathleen into the kind of woman who could become the moral centre of the family. "I have to prepare her for the life which lies before her, after I am gone. Everything will rest upon her, and she is only a child."<sup>45</sup> Mrs. Joliffe worries that Kathleen "would have no one to run to, in the thousand and one perplexities of daily life. My husband could not be troubled with them. He will lean upon her then, as he leans upon me now. It is his way. I must do what I can to prepare her."<sup>46</sup> Kathleen is mistakenly set up as the new mother figure and moral guide of the family. In the end, however, the daughter neglects her other familial duties in order to focus entirely on her father, and proves to be an inadequate replacement for her mother. "So far as lay within the bounds of possibility, she was resolved to be to him all that her mother had been."<sup>47</sup>

The father has an important role in this story, before and after his wife's death. This is not expressed in the centrality of his own moral example, but rather in his selection of a morally strong wife who could become the centre of the family and later in his determined search to find an adequate replacement for his deceased wife. Thus, a father's responsibility, in this and many other stories, is not to be the central moral and religious figure of the family, but to ensure that there is a female figure who can adequately fulfil that role, although it does remain preferable for a male figure to do so. While on a tour of the continent, the Joliffes meet two widows, one of whom, Mrs. Dobson, charms Mr. Joliffe almost immediately. Kathleen grows increasingly jealous of the new object of her father's attention.

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<sup>45</sup> "Kathleen: The Story of a Home," *The Sunday at Home Annual*. (London: Religious Tract Society, 1882) 194.

<sup>46</sup> "Kathleen," 195.

<sup>47</sup> "Kathleen," 307.

When the adolescent son is involved in the accidental shooting of Mr. Corrie, his tutor and family friend, and consequently runs away from home, Kathleen relies not on her own father but on male family friends who act as surrogate fathers. Kathleen says to her cousin, Kenison Montgomerie, "I want you to act for us all." She wishes him to step in since her father is "quite unnerved and bewildered, and I can ask him nothing."<sup>48</sup> and he "seems to have no energy to act."<sup>49</sup> She knew that she would have to be her father's support, not he hers; that she would have to care for him, not he for her; that she could not hope to lean upon him, but must expect him to lean upon her. Kathleen observes that with men like her cousin, Dr. Ritchie, her doctor, and Mr. Corrie, her future husband, "she knew that there would be in an hour of need the sense of rest on her part and of upholding on theirs, - a sense dear to the heart of every true woman. But with father, much as she loved him, she knew well it would not be so. She would have to be strong, for he would be weak."<sup>50</sup> Yet as Kathleen is not "strong" enough on her own, she needs the assistance of surrogate fathers to compensate for her father's inadequacies.

Mr. Joliffe is indeed a clear example of an inadequate father. He grows increasingly dependent on his daughter. He is portrayed as not really up to the task of parenting and is certainly an insufficient moral guide to his children. "A fine-looking man, six feet three in height, and of ample proportionate breadth and stoutness, he certainly gave strangers the impression that he was made to stand alone; but his wife and daughter knew well that this was the last thing he ever thought of doing. Whether weakness of decision or craving for sympathy lay under the characteristic, neither

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<sup>48</sup> "Kathleen," 283.

<sup>49</sup> "Kathleen," 284.

<sup>50</sup> "Kathleen," 306.

troubled herself to inquire – enough that he always did need companionship, and that what he required had to be given.”<sup>51</sup>

At the end of the story, everything is as it should be. Kathleen no longer sees Mrs. Dobson, the new Mrs. Joliffe, as a rival for her father’s affections, but rather as occupying her rightful place as centre of the family and as moral guide. As the new Mrs. Joliffe writes in her journal, when faced with trying to overcome the children’s emotional barriers to her: “I am not unhappy. Oh no, not with so dear and kind a husband. He depends greatly upon me for interest and companionship, and my delight is to give him all I can. He is, indeed, seldom content to have me an hour out of his sight, unless Kathleen is with him to take my place. Even that would not always content him.”<sup>52</sup> Realizing what her role in her new family should be, she is saddened in the beginning when her husband’s children prevent her from being of use. She becomes content when she could take her rightful place at the centre of the family, allowing Kathleen to build her own life. Kathleen is freed from her duties with her father to be able to marry the man she has loved for a long time, but could not possibly marry before a replacement was found to fulfil her pivotal role in the family. Her fiancé will be able to provide the kind of moral leadership her father lacked. Although the new Mrs. Joliffe is not a lady by birth, her strong religious faith makes her suitable to lead the more refined Joliffe family. Mr. Joliffe is attracted to her primarily for her gentleness and kindness, and not for her refinement, which is sometimes lacking. Mr. Joliffe, despite his faults, is portrayed as a good father because he selects a strong woman who is capable of becoming an effective new centre of the family.

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<sup>51</sup> “Kathleen,” 197.

<sup>52</sup> “Kathleen,” 452.

True religious faith is a central theme of “Kathleen: The Story of a Home.” Mr. Joliffe does not possess it. He is too self-centred to care for others above himself. As his wife says, “he is always ready for any kindness”<sup>53</sup> that his wife or daughter would plan, but he did not spread any kindness himself. Kathleen’s mother says to her, “when great trouble comes to you, the great comfort will be yours, of a loving Master close at hand to bear you up.”<sup>54</sup> The narrator explains that Kathleen’s strength in upholding her family, especially her father, through the extremely difficult time after her mother’s death, was a “calm and soft pervading sense that God loved her, that a Father’s arm was around her, that all would be well.”<sup>55</sup> It was not her earthly father’s arm, of course, but that of her Father in Heaven, who, along with some surrogate father figures, would support her through her trials. It was a faith in God and a reliance upon Him that directed all characters, not just Kathleen, on the path of self-sacrifice and love.

### **The Heavenly Father**

God, the heavenly Father, is ever present in these three periodicals. The term, “The Fatherhood of God”<sup>56</sup>, often repeated in RTS publications, is an important signifier of the close ties between the God and the earthly father. In many RTS stories, this tie is so strong that Father and father are used interchangeably. While stories featuring imperial masculinity were common, there was also a reaction against this in favour of Evangelical manhood. One stanza of the poem, “The Little Boy’s Faith in God,” is quite telling:

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<sup>53</sup> “Kathleen,” 194.

<sup>54</sup> “Kathleen,” 198.

<sup>55</sup> “Kathleen,” 244.

<sup>56</sup> “The Fatherhood of God,” *The Sunday at Home Annual* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1880) 508-509.

‘Our Father,’ sir, the prayer begins,  
Which makes me think that he,  
As we have no kind father here,  
Would our kind father be.<sup>57</sup>

This poem describes the total faith in God of a little six year old boy, one of four children of a widow who could not find her family enough bread to eat. The boy says the Lord’s Prayer with complete faith that God will provide their daily bread, when their mother could not, in the absence of an earthly father to provide for all of them. In this case, not only does the Father replace the father as moral and educational head of the family, but, by the end of the poem, the author also indicates that the boy rightly expects Him, at least figuratively, to take on the breadwinner role of the family.

There are many other examples of stories in which the heavenly Father substitutes for the earthly father. “A Discontented Boy”<sup>58</sup> by Sarson C.J. Ingham, is one of many stories in which the father is physically absent. Herber Letter had been close to his father before his death. They had shared a love of books. His mother could not have become his moral and educational centre because, too weak to sustain herself and her son, she died shortly after his father. Herber is not lucky enough to find an adequate surrogate father, and he is portrayed as a sad, “discontented boy” because of it. He is adopted by his uncle, a man who does not share Herber’s intellectual interests or his spirituality. Although Herber’s new home takes care of his physical needs, his spiritual and emotional needs are unmet. His direct relationship with God fills his spiritual void, as the Father replaces the father. Though persecuted by his uncle’s family, Herber perseveres in his intellectual and spiritual pursuits and finally develops a true relationship with God. He is no longer a

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<sup>57</sup> “The Little Boy’s Faith in God,” *The Sunday at Home Annual* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1854) 176.

<sup>58</sup> “A Discontented Boy,” *The Sunday at Home Annual* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1887) 638-672.

“discontented boy” and declares “I feel as if I could hunger no more, nor thirst any more, because I have found Jesus.”<sup>59</sup> While in this story Father and father are not entirely interchangeable concepts, God becomes a more than adequate fatherly figure for Herber when no earthly substitute for his father is available.

### **The Earthly Father**

Many other stories carry strong messages of the importance of the father’s moral and emotional role in the family. “Idonea”<sup>60</sup> by Anne Beale, (figure 3), is an entertaining serial story in which the father occupies a prominent place, though he is deceased even at the beginning of the story. Idonea’s father had been a pastor. She had been educated by her highly accomplished mother, but trained by her father, “a hardworking, exemplary country clergyman”.<sup>61</sup> Her father was a model parent. She learned common sense from him and was taught “humility and the beauty of holiness by the paternal [voice].<sup>62</sup> Unfortunately for the family’s financial situation and for his children’s moral formation, Idonea’s father died when she was fifteen. It is a great loss to the entire family, but specifically for Idonea who “had loved him dearly”.<sup>63</sup> Because of her family’s straitened financial circumstances after her father’s death, Idonea convinces her mother that she should go to London to become a companion to a girl of similar age. She would complete her education with the youngest daughter of Mr. Dooner, a rich entrepreneur, and his social climbing wife.

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<sup>59</sup> “A Discontented Boy,” 672.

<sup>60</sup> “Idonea,” *The Leisure Hour Annual* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1880) 417.

<sup>61</sup> “Idonea,” 433.

<sup>62</sup> “Idonea,” 434.

<sup>63</sup> “Idonea,” 434.

Idonea's brother Percy, a simple clergyman, takes on a paternal role toward his siblings after the father's death. Percy draws his twin sisters "lovingly towards him, rather as if he were their father than their brother."<sup>64</sup> He also helps Idonea find her position in the Dooner household and provides her with support and guidance while in London.

Idonea is contrasted with the Dooner daughters who lack her moral and pious behaviour and her unassuming and self-sacrificing nature. Idonea had been principally taught these strongly moral characteristics principally by her father, since she was old enough to be moulded by him before his death. After his death, Idonea is clearly guided by her relationship with her heavenly Father. In contrast, the Dooner daughters seem guided by worldly pursuits and appear vain and selfish when compared with Idonea. One daughter, Idonea's friend, is almost led astray by her supposed fiancé, who turns out to be a married man seeking the family's wealth. After witnessing his daughters' folly, Mr. Dooner reproaches himself for not taking a more active parental role. The narrator points out that Mr. Dooner should have paid more attention to family and less to business.<sup>65</sup> He is "the victim of his own easy nature. When too late, he finds that he ought to have looked a little more narrowly into his home affairs while spending his energy in making his millions in the City." As the narrator says, "It does not always do to sleep in your own house, even if you are wide awake in your office."<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> "Idonea," 754.

<sup>65</sup> "Idonea," 802.

<sup>66</sup> "Idonea," 802.

Fathers are of central importance in Religious Tract Society family journals. “To Parents, on the Decease of a Daughter”<sup>67</sup> is a poem in the 1879 Annual to soothe and console parents who have lost children. The beginning of the last stanza provides a good sample of the tone:

Weep not, O Stricken father, sorrowing mother,  
The Hand that dealt the blow will heal the sorrow,

The editor explains that this poem was not selected for its “literary merit,” but rather for its “truth” and “good feeling,” as it was written for the curate and his wife of the parish where the writer lives. In the poem, the father is given equal right with his wife to grieve for his lost daughter. Although historians have done little to acknowledge this, it is simply assumed in this poem (and in much other contemporary literary material), that men would participate in their children’s lives to the extent that the loss of one would constitute a great blow to fathers and mothers equally.

Pamela Walker suggests that many mid-nineteenth-century evangelicals elevated motherhood and intensified the importance of the mother in a child’s spiritual life. Mothers were often regarded as the most powerful guides to piety.<sup>68</sup> In contrast, at least for evangelicals associated with the Religious Tract Society, it was fatherhood which remained central to familial piety. In RTS publications, mothers become central figures only as replacements, often inadequate ones, for absent fathers. From the inception of the RTS family journals until at least 1889, the RTS’ view of the father’s rightful role within the family remained constant. Yet, in its early period, the RTS’ portrayal of fatherhood in

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<sup>67</sup> “To Parents, on the Decease of a Daughter,” *The Sunday at Home Annual* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1879) 606.

<sup>68</sup> Pamela J. Walker, *Pulling the Devil’s Kingdom Down: The Salvation Army in Victorian Britain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) 10.

stories is quite different from that in the decades leading to the end of the nineteenth century. In these early evangelical stories published by the RTS, both in its family journals and its other titles, it is taken for granted that fathers would impart moral and religious teachings to their children and undertake their spiritual guidance.<sup>69</sup> Until the last decades of the nineteenth century, the father's presence in the family is of central importance.

*The Leisure Hour* and *The Sunday at Home* clearly instructed their readers on how to maintain a moral and religious home, one that would foster harmony among its members and the effective raising of children. These two periodicals continually emphasised the importance of the father as spiritual centre of the family. In the article "Piety at Home," the important moral role of the father is stressed, although it is acknowledged that many might not be living up to their paternal responsibilities. "Would to God we all liked always to show such 'piety at home!' For if we did, all fathers would be fatherly (which they are not) [...]" The author acknowledges that there are qualities which make fathers "fatherly," but that actual fathers often fall short of this ideal. The article then proceeds with a description of what this ideal fatherly behaviour should be. "Let the Christian husband show Christ by beginning and never failing to continue family prayers. We said the archetype of our English home is to be sought among the patriarchs; well, wherever they went we read, 'there they builded [*sic*] an altar and called on the name of the Lord.' Let the Christian wife show it by gathering her children, even if she cannot get her husband, and praying for him if she dare not pray with him."<sup>70</sup> The wife

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<sup>69</sup> Examples of such publications are *A Present for the Young* and *The Boy's Week-day Book* and the periodical *Child's Companion or Sunday Scholar's Reward*, in addition to later periodicals such as *The Leisure Hour* and *The Sunday at Home*.

<sup>70</sup> "Piety at Home," *The Sunday at Home Annual* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1881) 323.

must take on the moral responsibilities that the husband neglects; she must replace him when needed. She is not, however, the initiator or interpreter of the “archetype” of the home, nor to be its moral centre. These are the responsibilities of the husband and father.

In the period 1879-1889, the traditional evangelical view of the ideal father remains unchanged. He remains of vital importance to the family. In many Religious Tract Society stories, however, the father is absent or inadequate and falls short of the Evangelical ideal. He is still central to the plot, but he is often no longer present in the family in the same way as he was in earlier RTS publications. Rather, these stories concern the emotional or physical absence or inadequacy of the father,<sup>71</sup> while emphasising that he is still necessary. In this later period of *The Sunday at Home* and *The Leisure Hour*, the figure of the father remains essential in these stories, but the authors increasingly worry that that role will not be adequately filled. As many of these stories mirror the lives of the readers and of their social superiors, fathers who always take the moral lead in the family occur rarely toward the end of the century, reflecting the changing roles of men in late nineteenth-century society. Yet in the following two stories in *The Leisure Hour*, the paternal role is still adequately filled. They illustrate the transferral of correct behaviour and morals from father to son. It is shown to be especially important for young men to have a strong role model and guide in their fathers, as the young man in each story is led astray by immoral and worldly influences. In large part because of the influence of his father, each boy eventually returns to the manly path of middle-class domesticity. For example, in “A Poor Gentleman,”<sup>72</sup> (figure 4), Sir Walter

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<sup>71</sup> John Tosh discusses the “absent father” in “Authority and Nurture in Middle-Class Fatherhood: The Case of Early and Mid-Victorian England,” *Gender & History* 8.1 (1996) 48-64. His categorization includes only emotionally absent fathers. I would like to enlarge this category to include physically absent fathers.

<sup>72</sup> “A Poor Gentleman,” *The Leisure Hour Annual* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1886) 1.

Penton had no male heir, as both his young sons had died as a result of their debauched lives. His title and house were to be passed to his nephew, Edward. "And people pitied the father [Sir Walter Penton] to whom it must be, they felt, so great a disappointment that his baronetcy and his old lands should go out of the family."<sup>73</sup>

In the meantime, Edward's son, also named Walter, falls in love with a thoroughly unsuitable young lady, the daughter of a London actress. While Walter is in London attempting to convince the young woman into marriage, his father is suffering at home.<sup>74</sup> Though his wife and children scarcely venture to speak to him in "his self-absorbed and resentful gloom," Edward Penton has more of the family's sympathy than his wife. "He not only suffered, but looked as if he suffered. He lost his colour, he lost his appetite, he was restless, incapable of keeping still. He could no longer bear the noise of the children, and sickened at the sight of food."<sup>75</sup> He proves himself to be a devoted father by going to London in search of his son. Edward would take care of his family himself, including the arduous search for his son. He could not bare other men, even those in authority, to look for Walter. "He was an old-fashioned man, and it seemed to him that 'to set the police after' his son was an indignity impossible. He could not do it. He tramped about himself, yearning, angry, very tender underneath, thinking if he could only see Walter, meet him, which always seems so likely to country people, in the street, all would be well."<sup>76</sup>

While his father is in London frantically searching for him, Walter says that "he had thought at first that it was a mean thing to suppose that it made any difference, or

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<sup>73</sup> "A Poor Gentleman," 6.

<sup>74</sup> "A Poor Gentleman," 730.

<sup>75</sup> "A Poor Gentleman," 668.

<sup>76</sup> "A Poor Gentleman," 672.

disturbed any of the bonds of duty: but now his mind was changed, and he perceived that a man had his own career to think of, that nature forbids him to be always in a state of subordination to his father – nature, and the consciousness that he has enough of his own to live upon without troubling his father.”<sup>77</sup> Walter would like to break free from his father’s control and be a man in his own right, yet he lacks the maturity to do so. It is his father’s example which in the end makes him reject the fast city life and charms of the young lady, as he returns to his family and values his domesticated traditions.

When encountering problems with their son, Sir Edward wants to run up to his room to talk to him. His wife acknowledges his central position, and yet would like also to participate in their son’s upbringing. She says, “I know the father is the first. It’s right that you should be the first; but, Edward, this once let me see him, let me speak to him.”<sup>78</sup> This story reveals much else about the primary role of the father. When Sir Edward’s daughter confesses that she is in love with Mr. Rochford, the family solicitor, her mother “kept reflecting to herself, ‘What will her father say?’ all the time in her heart.”<sup>79</sup> As the narrator says, “Circumstances alter much, but not even the advanced views of the nineteenth century can alter the position in which a young lover stands before the father of the girl he loves – a functionary perhaps a little discredited by the march of modern ideas, but who nevertheless has still an enormous power in his hands, a power which a feminine heart continues to believe in, which is certainly able to cause a great deal of discomfort and inconvenience, if nothing else.”<sup>80</sup> In stories such as this, the father occupies a central place within the family. In traditional Evangelical fashion, he is clearly

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<sup>77</sup> “A Poor Gentleman,” 676.

<sup>78</sup> “A Poor Gentleman,” 594.

<sup>79</sup> “A Poor Gentleman,” 736.

<sup>80</sup> “A Poor Gentleman,” 801.

the head of the family, with authority given to him by God. He is also a caring and gentle father, who emulates God in his patience and love for his children.

This story also demonstrates the negative effects on children of a father who does not live up to the Evangelical ideal and is not an adequate moral guide for his children. This is mainly illustrated by the tragic story of Sir Walter Penton, who is left with no direct heir after both his sons killed themselves slowly by leading intemperate lives in the city. He says pitifully to his daughter Alicia on his deathbed:

My two poor boys – poor boys! I might be hard on them sometimes. There was the disappointment and the humiliation. God would be kinder to them. He’s the real father, you know. I feel it myself. Many and many a time in these long years my heart has yearned over them. Oh, poor boys, poor silly boys! had they but known, at least in their last day – Alicia! how could you and I standing outside know what was passing between God and them when they lay – as I am lying now?”

I feel easy about the boys, not anxious any longer. After all, you know, they belong to God too, although they are foolish and weak. Very likely they are doing better – well, now – <sup>81</sup>

In this dramatic moment at the end of his life, Sir Walter acknowledges that he had been an inadequate father to his boys, absent, not physically, but as their moral guide. God would be “kinder to them.” Though he clearly felt love and tenderness toward his sons, he regrets that he could not emulate God and dispense with “the disappointment and the humiliation” he felt while they were alive. Yet, as is repeated in many RTS stories, he points out that God was present to compensate for his inadequacies toward his sons. Sir Walter could not guide them past their “foolish[ness] and weak[ness]” while they were alive, but God would ensure that “they are doing better – well” in death. If they would not listen to their father in life, they would at least follow God in death, since He is “the real

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<sup>81</sup> “A Poor Gentleman,” 367.

father". The traditional Evangelical connection between the father and the Father is thus made clear. The father receives his authority over his family from God, but God is the ultimate Father, ready to fill in for the earthly father when fails to meet his moral responsibilities to his family. When adequately performing his role, the earthly father is, however, held to be a direct and essential moral force in the family, whose influence over his children is significant.

Many Religious Tract Society stories emphasize the earthy father's role in influencing his children's moral behaviour. As with Sir Edward's and Sir Walter's sons, *A Lost Son* is the story of a young man who temporarily forsakes his family and is led astray by many nefarious temptations in the city. In the end, this tale represents the triumph of the older values of middle-class domestication, as represented by the values of the father, over the fast life of the *fin-de-siècle*. Julian Serlcote, the son, takes no interest in his father's shop, and is a "weak, pleasure-loving, self-indulgent young man."<sup>82</sup> Yet, his father Joshua, "stiff, prim old martinet that he was, had a secret pride in this son of his."<sup>83</sup> When he first talks to Agnes, Julian's fiancée, of Julian, the old man "had betrayed with touching simplicity the pride and delight he had in his son. No detail seemed to have been too minute for his notice. "I never saw the gentleman who could hand a teacup with more grace than that which is natural to my boy," he said one day."<sup>84</sup> Joshua's pride, however, has its human limits.

As Julian drifts increasingly away from his family, Joshua speaks about Julian in an apologetic tone. Whatever the son does the father now seems anxious to set in the fairest light possible. He never loses an opportunity of doing this. "It comforted him,

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<sup>82</sup> "A Lost Son," *The Leisure Hour Annual* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1885) 4.

<sup>83</sup> "A Lost Son," 194.

<sup>84</sup>"A Lost Son," 77.

helped him to believe his own word. No one knew how pathetically he had determined to believe it.”<sup>85</sup> Embarrassed by his own behaviour and unable to face Joshua, Julian flees his father’s house after stealing a large sum of his money, to continue his downward spiral of vice in the city. Julian’s mother is saddened, yet she remains peripheral to the plot. It is his father’s grief which is thoroughly explored. His son was “not forgotten – no, nor was he forgiven, though through these two long years the old man had hardly any abiding thought save the thought of his absent son, yet never again had any burst of tenderness arrested the hardening of his grief.”<sup>86</sup>

Yet again, religious themes are emphasised to uphold and strengthen the position of the father in the family, and consequently, of the family itself. When news that Julian is dying alone in the city reached Agnes, she exclaims passionately, “Think of him, Uncle Joshua – think of him!” “He is alone, penniless, dying, and pleads that he may not die unforgiven. Is it possible that you can refuse to forgive him? Think of that other father – the father of the prodigal son in the Bible! When the prodigal was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.”<sup>87</sup> The Parable of the Prodigal Son in the Gospel of Luke is the familiar story of a rebellious son who rejects his father’s upbringing. Prideful and strong, the son, like Julian Serlcote, leaves his father for a wild life of adventure, and squanders everything of value (literally and symbolically). The son returns home when confronted with failure and despair, repentant and willing to do anything to win back his father’s favour. Agnes wishes that Joshua would emulate the father in the parable who forgives his son and welcomes him back lovingly. The wish to have the earthly father emulate the heavenly Father in

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<sup>85</sup> “A Lost Son,” 77.

<sup>86</sup> “A Lost Son,” 155.

<sup>87</sup> “A Lost Son,” 221.

forgiveness is quite apparent in this story, as it is in many others. The father should also provide a good moral example for his children, especially for his sons. He will thus ensure that his sons will eventually follow the moral path and embrace Evangelical domestic values, even if they are temporarily led astray by worldly temptations.

Joshua did indeed regret that he was not more forgiving, more God-like, toward his son. Angry with Julian for neglecting his responsibilities toward his family and his fiancée, he did not open his letter asking for assistance for eight days. As a result, he comes to believe that his son has died as a result of his stubbornness and inaction. “It was my doing – I did it. I would not let Agnes open the letter. If I had given her some money to send to him he would have stayed in the lodging, and Martin would have found him there and brought him back. I wanted to do it; all the while I wanted to do it, but I couldn’t, I couldn’t! I don’t know why, I don’t know why! I wanted him – I wanted my boy, my Absalom! Oh, Absalom! my son, my son! Would to God I had died for thee!”<sup>88</sup> Absalom (II Kings, iii, 2, 3) is an Old Testament example of a wayward son. He is the third son of king David, a youth whose appearance is marked by faultless beauty. His outer appearance is contrasted with his ambitious and calculating character, which leads to alienation from David and eventually banishment for murder and plotting against his father. David forgives his son once and allows him to return to the city. Absalom does not repent, however, and yet again plots against his father. In the end, the son is killed, and David mourns the loss of his son in the words that Joshua Serlcote repeats above. Joshua fears that his human feelings of anger toward his son would contribute to his death, as in the biblical story of Absalom.

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<sup>88</sup> “A Lost Son,” 224.

The ending for Joshua and his son, however, is a happy one. Julian sees the error of his ways, remembers Joshua's moral teachings and returns to his father's house. Joshua finds his son lying on the ground and subsequently collapses as he believes him to be dead (figure 5). Both father and son recover together and Julian goes on to assume all the duties of a domesticated Evangelical man. Predictably, with the usual Evangelical emphasis on the New Testament rather than the Old, in the end, his and his father's fate resemble the parable of the prodigal son in the New Testament, rather than that of Absalom and King David in the Old Testament. As the narrator says, "Joshua Serlcote lived to see his son an honoured man and trusted; lived to see his niece [Agnes] a happy woman much loved and much loving; lived to find joy in the affection of his little grandchildren, who grew up about his knee; and lived to thank God [...]." <sup>89</sup> In this story, God's role is essential, as it is his example that ultimately shapes the conduct of father and son. Yet without a strong earthly father as a model, it is clear that Julian would have lacked the deeply moral conscience which eventually led him back to the family.

In other stories, the focus is on the absent father and the negative consequences for children connected with that absence. "The Old Man's Will," <sup>90</sup> (figure 6), is a variation on the absent father theme. Etta's father died in India while she was a little girl. Her mother, wanting to secure her daughter's future, returns to her place of origin and marries Mr. Rivers, a man with considerable agricultural land. Etta's mother dies shortly after, leaving Etta in the care of her stepfather. Mr. Rivers resents having this burden who had vied successfully with him for his wife's affection, but he is especially troubled by

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<sup>89</sup> "A Lost Son," 227.

<sup>90</sup> "The Old Man's Will," *The Leisure Hour Annual* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1883) 1.

his promise that Etta would inherit his ancestral home, Deane Hollow, at the expense of his nephew's inheritance.

In one significant dialogue, Mr. Rivers reveals his views toward his stepdaughter: "We shall see who is master. I will have no airs and graces here, and if you think I will you are much mistaken."<sup>91</sup> Mr. Rivers had never thought much about Etta. Though he wishes to assert himself as master over Etta, he does not play at all a fatherly role toward the young woman. Etta had "meant to try to be a daughter to her mother's husband,"<sup>92</sup> and yet this man thought only about Etta's mother Maggie who alone had occupied any place in his views and calculations with regard to the future.<sup>93</sup> Upon her death, lacking any kind of fatherly tenderness toward his deceased wife's daughter, he feels saddled with the girl.

Etta is naively full of good intentions of how she will come to the aid of the poor once she is mistress of Deane Hollow. She is, however, not seen as a mature woman since she is not positioning herself for marriage and is not self-sacrificing, but rather wilful and independent. Since her own father had died, she lacks any sort of father figure, a deficiency which is shown to be at least partly responsible for her character defects. She certainly does not have a father-daughter relationship with Mr. Rivers. As Etta becomes increasingly self-willed and disobedient, Mr. Rivers grows more "cross and surly, and once even threatened her with his riding-whip."<sup>94</sup> Only after Etta became deathly ill does Mr. Rivers develop a more fatherly attachment. "Etta's illness seemed to have a softening effect upon Mr. Rivers also, judging by his anxiety respecting her. As she grew worse his

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<sup>91</sup> "The Old Man's Will," 5.

<sup>92</sup> "The Old Man's Will," 6.

<sup>93</sup> "The Old Man's Will," 2.

<sup>94</sup> "The Old Man's Will," 4.

anger abated: twice a day if not oftener, he demanded a report of her condition, and not only asked after her the first thing when he awoke, but required the doctor's opinion and remarks to be retailed to him after every visit."<sup>95</sup> Unfortunately, Mr. Rivers dies before they could develop a father-daughter relationship. Their strained relationship highlights Etta's need for a surrogate father who will morally guide her and mould her into a woman with traditional Evangelical values. While Etta is eventually taught to be less wilful and independent, the message of the story is that marriage is the key to her happiness and fulfilment. The Religious Tract Society clearly wants to demonstrate that traditional Evangelical values bring harmony and contentment for women and for men, as Etta finally embraces her new role as a traditional wife.

Mr. Reade, the vicar, is, in one sense, the only father figure in Etta's life, as he was the only one to provide her with religious and moral guidance. "His judicious teaching, his tender sympathy, and, above all, his personal character, exercised an undeniable influence over her."<sup>96</sup> He reminds her of her relationship with God. He asks her, "what place has God in your future plans? Has He the principal part – has He any plans, or is He left out of the life He has given you – is it to be lived for yourself alone and for what pleases and interests you, or what pleases Him?"<sup>97</sup> And when after Mr. Rivers death Etta is for a while penniless, it is her inheritance from Mr. Reade that maintains her. Mr. Nash, the lawyer, also treats Etta "with almost paternal tenderness."<sup>98</sup> These, however, are not entirely adequate fatherly substitutes for the girl.

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<sup>95</sup> "The Old Man's Will," 323.

<sup>96</sup> "The Old Man's Will," 327.

<sup>97</sup> "The Old Man's Will," 11.

<sup>98</sup> "The Old Man's Will," 390.

After Etta recovers from her illness, she finds a replacement for her father in Mr. Rivers' nephew, whom she finally agrees to marry after much cajoling by Mr. Reade. He is very clear in his approval of the young man and declares, "My dear, I would wish no better lot for a daughter of my own if I had one. Mr. Ernest Rivers is a man to whom any father might willingly consign his child."<sup>99</sup> Thus, all of Etta's problems are solved. She and Ernest Rivers can share the inheritance and land bequeathed by Mr. Rivers. More importantly, she finally is influenced by fatherly moral authority to control her childish and impetuous nature and reveal the worthy woman within. Etta is moulded into a traditional wife, while her husband is the undisputed head of the family. This story thus provides a moral template for both men and women who might stray from traditional Evangelical familial roles.

### **The Surrogate Father**

Due to the increasing complexity of late nineteenth-century society, the absent father becomes a significant and common theme in both *The Leisure Hour* and *The Sunday at Home* in the early 1880s. More specifically, in response to men's perceived neglect of the family and increasing interest in imperial adventures and in homo-social activities, the dead father becomes a new and reoccurring theme in Religious Tract Society stories. His absence (rather than their presence) has a profound impact on the family. Perhaps this was a convenient way for the RTS of addressing the problem of male absence in the home, without appearing unpatriotic by criticizing men whose imperial duties increasingly called them away from home. More importantly, the centrality of the

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<sup>99</sup> "The Old Man's Will," 265.

father is emphasized in many of these stories by the need for a surrogate father to replace the absent father. The surrogate father then becomes the moral head of the family, filling the traditional Evangelical role of the father. "Barbara's Brothers"<sup>100</sup> by Evelyn Everett Green, (figure 7), provides an important example of an absent father. This story bridges the categories of earthly father and surrogate father, as the son becomes an effective replacement for the father and fully takes on the role of the earthly father. Here we see the centrality of the father figure to the family, whether biological or surrogate. Beginning a promising career in London, Wulfric is a medical doctor like his father, Dr. Meynal, and his father before him. After his father's death, Wulfric is obliged to sacrifice his own plans to take on his father's country practice and support his mother and siblings. He also tries to replace his father in all other ways, becoming the moral head of the family. Wulfric was in a position to replace his father because he had all the qualities of a "good man." He does not need any female replacement to provide the family's moral authority. He must endure his difficult and demanding mother. He ensures his sisters' virtue and facilitates their marriages. Most importantly, he must deal with his wayward brother Gerald, who has fallen into a life of dissipation and idleness and has succumbed to many *fin-de-siècle* temptations.

In this story it is quite apparent that the characters who are successful in worldly ways are those who have strong and true spiritual convictions and traditional domestic Christian values. The two Meynal brothers could not have been more dissimilar. While Wulfric was taking care of his family's every material and spiritual need, Gerald was being led astray by nefarious worldly influences, which almost cause his demise. It is Wulfric, in true fatherly form, who rescues Gerald from his destructive ways and leads

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<sup>100</sup> "Barbara's Brothers," *The Sunday at Home Annual* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1887) 1.

him back to his family. The ending is a happy one: Gerald learns that traditional domestic values, good morals and hard work lead to happiness, and he settles down and gets married. He and his wife move into the Meynal family home to take care of his demanding mother, liberating Wulfric from his familial obligations. Consequently, Wulfric marries Reinée, a young woman with strong religious convictions, and they begin their new life together with a “simple vow of dedication on their lips”: “let us give ourselves and our lives to Him, for is it not He who has given us to one another?”<sup>101</sup>

“In Father’s Place,” from the “Pages for the Young” section of the 1883 *The Sunday at Home*, is the epitome of the surrogate father story. Young Will is “a grave lad of seventeen”<sup>102</sup> who promised to be “a father to his fatherless sisters.” His father’s sister tells Will that he is “practising a great self-denial” and that all depends upon him. Her advice is to “be strong and of good courage, resting on your father’s God, who will help you through all difficulties.”<sup>103</sup> As a surrogate, Will fulfils his duties “in the father’s place” and in return is “to be loved and honoured as the father was.”<sup>104</sup> He manages to support his family under difficult financial and emotional circumstances as they are obliged to leave their home after the father’s death, only to return to the manse when Will eventually takes his father’s place as minister of his native parish.<sup>105</sup> He thus replaces his father in both his public and private capacities, subsuming his personal desires and his youth to the needs of his family.

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<sup>101</sup> “Barbara’s Brothers,” 389.

<sup>102</sup> “In Father’s Place,” *The Sunday at Home Annual* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1883) 143.

<sup>103</sup> “In Father’s Place,” 144.

<sup>104</sup> “In Father’s Place,” 160.

<sup>105</sup> “In Father’s Place,” 206.

### **The *Boy's Own Paper* as a Special Case**

The “Pages for the Young” section was featured in *The Sunday at Home* through the 1870s and early 1880s, ending in late 1884. Afterward, neither *The Sunday at Home* nor *The Leisure Hour* contained special sections for children as both periodicals were intended for family reading: perhaps RTS members increasingly recognized that it was desirable and useful for parents and children to be educated and entertained together, at a level accessible to all. This was certainly the image conveyed by illustrations, such as the frontispiece of *The Leisure Hour*, which shows the paterfamilias reading to his family. The special time thus set aside would be dually important, both in its medium and in its message. The act of reading together would promote family cohesion while the content of this family reading would stress familial morality and Evangelical values. There was, therefore, no longer a special section for youngsters to read by themselves. In 1879, however, the *Boy's Own Paper* was founded specifically for boys, as young as ten years old. Much of what was published in the early paper was typical for its time, but it immediately succeeded because it appealed to boys as well as to their parents. The predominately serial stories were not overtly didactic or religious, but catered to boys' fantasy life. Readers could expect to find science, natural history, puzzles, school and adventure stories, essay competitions, and personal reminiscences, all delivered with a suitable moral tone.

Idealized notions of masculinity were inculcated not only through formal education and training in the home, but also through reading and leisure activities. The entertaining light reading for boys found in the *BOP* provides us with access to such

notions. Victorian middle-class boys confronted the dominant demand that they be independent, self-reliant, and self-contained. Many also heard the minoritarian Evangelical voice which encouraged traditional domesticated values. Liberalism and Evangelicalism, according to Meredith Veldman, provided complementary outlines of femininity, but clashed in their fight to refigure masculinity, creating the tension inherent in the position of the middle-class son. These two central Victorian ideologies depicted the ideal woman as submissive, self-effacing, morally superior, yet intellectually and economically dependent. Evangelicalism, however, demanded that men also be pure, humble, self-abnegating, and spiritually dependent, while the liberal doctrine required adult males to be aggressive, self-assertive, ambitious and independent.<sup>106</sup> While liberal parents sent their children to public school in order to learn self-reliance and develop independently, the Religious Tract Society instructed boys through the *BOP* to follow the Evangelical model of manhood, while they were still young enough to shape. While providing conflicting views of ideal masculinity, both public schools and the *BOP* offered authoritative voices in moulding and educating boys, without a direct challenge to paternal authority. It is crucial to note, however, that only the Evangelical model would prepare boys for their future roles as fathers, as these are envisioned in the RTS publications for families. By the end of the century, the dichotomy between fatherhood and the imperial undomesticated variety of masculinity was clearly shown in the *BOP*. While stories in the weekly *BOP* reflected the popular dominant version of imperial and muscular Christian masculinity, the message in these same weeklies clearly preserved the (by that time) minoritarian view of domesticated masculinity and the traditional Evangelical values to which it was connected.

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<sup>106</sup> Veldman, 7.

In the context of this paper and in light of the RTS' ongoing concern with fatherhood, it is perhaps surprising that this periodical contains little direct discussion of fatherhood, neither boys' relationships with their fathers, nor instructions to boys about their future fatherly duties. Even so, significant remnants of domesticated Evangelical and romanticized Christian manliness can be found in the *BOP*, in tension with the new image of imperial masculinity. Though fatherhood is rarely the focus, the qualities described as being essential for fatherhood in an earlier generation were still stressed continually in the *BOP*.

Also, and more importantly for my purposes here, the *BOP* took on an almost paternal role toward its young readers from all classes, inculcating in them a bourgeois version of Evangelical masculinity which it could no longer be assumed was taught at home or at school. Members of the RTS were concerned that this paper (unlike their papers for families) was read by boys who might not live in "proper" Christian homes. Consequently, the *BOP* had to take on the role of the Christian father. For example, the weekly "Correspondence" section at the back of every issue of the *BOP* provides some fatherly answers to young boys' questions about life. In response to "E.A. Roles," for example, the *BOP* writes "1. Learn a trade if you can. Special knowledge is always better, in a money-making sense, than general knowledge." The same paragraph further contained responses to young E.A. Roles eclectic mix of inquiries: "2. Mixed diet is best. Our teeth would tell you this. Some are like those of carnivorous, others like those of herbivorous animals. Some vegetable foods are as nutritious as most animal foods. 3. Your voice will probably come right in time. Keep your stamps. Such advertisements are

traps for silly birds.”<sup>107</sup> In these advice sections, the editors provide boys with answers to some of their burning questions. In an earlier generation, fathers would have been expected to give career advice to their sons. Many young men would have entered an apprenticeship at their fathers’ recommendation, or been trained to take on the familial enterprise. Yet the *BOP* did not hesitate to give this kind of advice. Sometimes, the editors would even respond by suggesting a course of action that the father might take in ensuring his son’s future. This section also contains a wide variety of other comments for the *BOP*’s young correspondents, from administering practical advice to suggestions concerning frivolous pastimes. It is interesting that the *BOP* saw fit to answer some of these more serious queries, which traditionally might have been more suitably answered by fathers or at least by school masters.

In the “Our Note Book” section of the *BOP*, a poem called “Do the Right, Boys” repeats the message of numerous *BOP* poems and songs. The last stanza is particularly interesting, given its overtly Evangelical tone.

Have courage, boys, go on and win, Walk in the good old way,  
 Strive day by day to conquer sin,  
 And ever watch and pray;  
 Success will come, still persevere,  
 And keep the prize in sight;  
 Help from on high your heart will cheer  
 While fighting for the right.<sup>108</sup>

Interestingly, this stanza conveys not only the values with strong religious underpinning that the *BOP* wished to inculcate in its young readers, but also the recognition that if boys were to follow this advice, they would be “walk[ing] in the good *old* way” [emphasis added]. Good, traditional values seem to be contrasted with newer, more morally dubious

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<sup>107</sup> “Correspondence,” *The Boy’s Own Annual* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1881) 312.

<sup>108</sup> “Do the Right, Boys,” *The Boy’s Own Annual* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1880) 26.

ones. In fact, the association of “new” values with “sin” seems quite apparent, which needs to be “conquered” by traditional Evangelical values with their accompanied “watch[fulness] and pray[er].” The poem makes it clear that boys who fight for these values, “for the right,” would be supported by God with His “help from on high,” no matter whether boys had earthly fathers to lead them morally or not. The focus of this poem is clearly on the moral education of boys. Many RTS poems and stories demonstrate similar views on juvenile education as other types of Victorian fiction.<sup>109</sup> A good childhood education could produce a temperament with a strong natural moral sense. Instruction contained within RTS articles was therefore important initially as a device which could develop the character traits that were positive and “good”, while eradicating those traits which would generally be described as “defects” or weaknesses.

In a piece entitled “Can’t Rub It Out”, the *BOP* educates young boys on correct and moral behaviour.

Don’t write there,” said a father to his son, who was writing with a diamond on the window; “you can’t rub that out.” Did it ever occur to the reader that he is daily writing that which *he* can’t rub out?” You made a cruel speech to your mother the other day! It wrote itself on her loving heart, and gave her great pain. It is there now, and hurts her every time she thinks of it. You can’t rub it out. You whispered a wicked thought one day in the ear of your playmate! It wore itself on his mind, and led him to do a wicked act. It is there now; you can’t rub it out.<sup>110</sup>

This passage demonstrates that forethought, sensitivity and kindness to women are vitally important characteristics for developing men. These values, taught early, were to see

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<sup>109</sup> Judith Rowbotham points out in her study of guidance for girls in Victorian fiction, that for “the best and most permanent results, character, like a sense of religion, had to be fostered and trained from early childhood. Indifferent education in these respects in the formative years could prevent the early development of a strong character, while a sound one could impart lasting strength and resilience of character to a weak nature, masculine or feminine.” (Rowbotham, 102).

<sup>110</sup> “Can’t Rub It Out,” *The Boy’s Own Annual* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1886) 783.

these young men through their future lives as husbands and fathers. The *BOP* author chose to give this article a more explicit than usual paternal voice. In presenting this advice as a father's lecture to his son, the advice is given more gravity and authority. Furthermore, here the *BOP* clearly positions itself in the role of the father. While it is clear that the *BOP* deemed this advice to be best taught by fathers to their sons, this article demonstrates the necessity of including it in a wholesome publication for boys in order to instruct them on traditional, domesticated Evangelical values, eventually to be passed on to their own sons.

## **Conclusion**

The widespread historiographical acceptance of the idea of the nineteenth-century triumph of separate spheres and of the ideology of domesticity has had tremendous implications for the history of nineteenth-century fatherhood. On one level, it has curtailed the study of male parenting. Why examine the father's role when it is seen as only a minor part of nineteenth-century family life? By dichotomizing the roles of women and men into private and public spheres, historians have vastly over-simplified the complex gender and family relations of nineteenth-century Britain. They have decided that if women's place in the family increased, men's role necessarily decreased. There is little consideration of the possibility that both female and male parental roles might have grown and complemented each other, at least for certain sections of the population. Some historians have simply assumed that fathers lost domestic power during

this era; ignoring actual power relations within the home they have seemed content to develop the history of male parenting from extrapolation rather than research.

This paper has begun to address the issue of how constructions of fatherhood were built up during boyhood through Religious Tract Society publications for families and for boys. The addition of children, especially boys, to historical inquiries of fatherhood is of great importance since it contributes to our understanding of how boys were raised to be future fathers. Paying due respect to the perceived need for fathers' contributions in raising their daughters and sons begins to redress the balance in the literature on the family, which at present concentrates almost exclusively on motherhood. Perhaps, as the history of fatherhood develops the same kind of maturity that the more prolonged study of the history of women and of motherhood has achieved, this omission will be rectified. Scholars increasingly understand that we must not only meet the father, but get intimately acquainted with him, enriching family, children's and gender history in the process.

Portrayals of the father in these Religious Tract Society periodicals was part of a larger *fin-de-siècle* project to preserve nineteenth century Evangelical middle-class values in a time of flux and major ideological and societal change. During this period, the *BOP* and RTS family periodicals like *The Sunday at Home* and *The Leisure Hour* continued to instruct boys in traditional Evangelical values. Through both fiction and non-fiction, they provided boys and their families with "correct" models of family life, continually emphasizing the central moral influence that the father should have over his family and cautioning readers on the dangers of diverting from that model. The *BOP*, at least in its first ten years, thus helped mediate the transition between conflicting views of

masculinity. RTS publishers emphatically argued that fathers could still, as in earlier generations, have a significant role within the family, and not be strangers to it. The late-nineteenth-century Evangelical ideals of the father are outlined in the title illustration (frontispiece). All family members are relating to each other in a relaxed way. The wife and children quietly but respectfully trust the father. They are poor, yet serene and their ragged clothes are presumably clean, indicating humble respectability. The father is much involved in the bathing and is supportive and helping. As demonstrated in this image, fathers should not only happily play with their contented children, but, more importantly, whether working class, like this father, middle class like Idonea's father, or upper class like Sir Edward Penton, but they should also remain the moral and educational centre of the family. Through many of its stories and articles, the Religious Tract Society's fervent desire was made explicit: to ensure that indeed, "Daddy's Come Home."



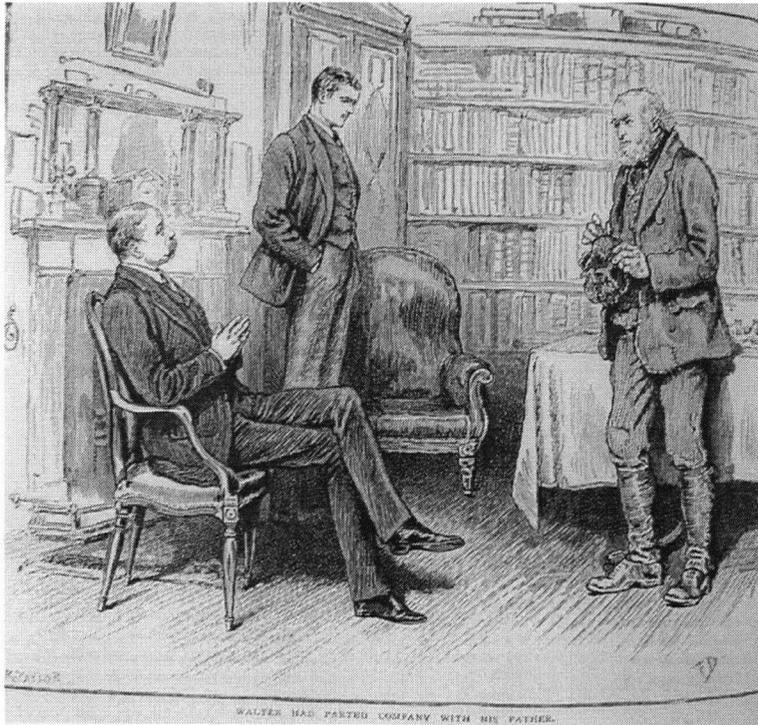
**Figure 1** “Going to Church with Papa” (From an Old Picture)  
(*The Sunday at Home*, 1879: 577.)



**Figure 2** "Was it this which upset you, Leena?" (Kathleen and Kenison)  
 ("Kathleen," *The Sunday at Home*, 1882: 293.)



**Figure 3** "Home Anxieties"  
 ("Idonea," *The Leisure Hour*, 1880: 433.)



**Figure 4** "Walter had parted company with his father."  
 ("A Poor Gentleman," *The Leisure Hour*, 1886: 586.)

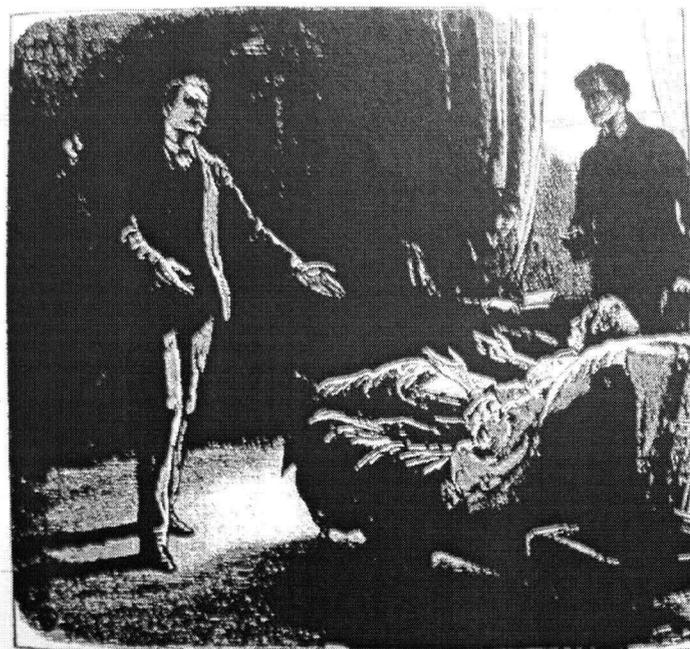


**Figure 5** "He spoke, but there was no answer"  
 ("A Lost Son," *The Leisure Hour*, 1885: 226.)



**Figure 6** “Jewels for Miss Etta” (Etta and her stepfather.)

(“The Old Man’s Will,” *The Leisure Hour*, 1883: 1.)



**Figure 7** “Mother, I have come home.”

(“Barbara’s Brothers,” *The Sunday at Home*, 1887: 385.)

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