BOOKS have long been popular Christmas gifts for children. Many a nineteenth-century child found a small book tucked away in his stocking on Christmas morning along with a pen wiper, an orange, a doll, or a deck of "Authors." Among its treasures, the Minnesota Historical Society has a small collection of these quaint children's books, dating back almost to 1800. Inscriptions in some of them show that they once were Christmas presents which delighted their young recipients on holidays of long ago.

The books in this collection not only illustrate what children of the nineteenth century were given to read; they also give a glimpse of how the children lived and the attitude of their elders toward them. Although in some respects these books resemble their modern counterparts, most of them lack illustrations. They are also more serious in tone, less attractive in format, and often unbelievably difficult in vocabulary and subject matter.

Instruction, rather than entertainment, was the main purpose of most of the children's books of the last century. Sometimes the author's aim was to teach courtesy, correctness, and a submissive attitude toward parents. Often he wished to impart religious and moral truths. Many stories warn the young reader, in the most mournful tones, to repent and save his soul while there is yet time. A typical example is The Story of Grace Harriet, the Little Sufferer; Who Died in New York, April 15, 1837, Age Nine. This glum little tale, bound in black, without a single picture, was no doubt considered proper reading material for a young person on a Sabbath afternoon.

MISS POATGIETER is editor of the Gopher Historian, the Minnesota Historical Society's magazine for children.
In *The Merchant's Daughter and Other Narratives* (1852), the Reverend J. T. Barr preached about the dire fate of a backslider who is pictured kneeling on his coffin before being hanged, and the sad case of young Mary who “incantiously repaired to a scene of amusement without proper protection.” To a modern adult, the stories are unrelieved gloom. Today's children would find them frightening, if not totally incomprehensible.

In the society's collection are several examples of stories that were supposed to teach proper deportment. Be good and you will be happy was the firm belief of every respectable parent. Goodness in children meant being dutiful, industrious, and unquestioningly obedient, and children's books of the nineteenth century gave much support to parents who wanted to instill these qualities in their offspring. One story praises a child who found strawberries in the woods and took them home to his mother instead of eating them himself; another describes the shining example of young William who took presents to his old granny; and a third tells of little Mary who cared for her younger sister while mamma went to market.

In a booklet of *Moral and Instructive Tales for the Amusement of Children of Both Sexes*, the author points out the rewards of proper conduct and the sad results of disobedience. Because little Nelly was a good girl and didn't cry when her brother went off to sea, he brought her "pretty shells and beautiful birds" when he returned. Caroline kept her little garden plot in good order, so "she had often a pretty nosegay to give her Mamma." Little Anne did as her mother said and did not eat too many currant cakes with cream. But Edward and Lucy, being disobedient, got sick and fell out of the swing.

Most of the books in this collection were obviously designed by adults to give children not what they wanted, but what the grown-ups thought they should have. Youngsters of the nineteenth century undoubtedly had some fun, but one would hardly know it from reading most of these books. Even activities that we think of as amusements are treated in the most solemn manner. One discussion of fishing starts: "Angling as an amusement is hardly worth the attention of the young. . . . But when this occupation is pursued for other purposes than that of sport, it may be viewed in quite another light."

A really attractive booklet of the Civil War period, illustrated with many colored pictures, does not fail to moralize. Of its two stories in rhyme, the first preaches the virtues of temperance by relating the sad tale of rich Mrs. Duck who died from overeating. The other tells of a jolly party of dogs who have a dance. Although it omits a direct moral, the reader is assured that the dogs were "polite," and "understood manners," and

"The terrier, though wild,
Had the sense to be quiet,
For, when females are present,
There should be no riot."

A charmingly designed little book, containing a version of the famous story of *The Children's Christmas party of 1881*, as pictured in Rand, "Holly and Mistletoe"
Babes in the Woods, is addressed to "parents dear" and informs the reader: "A doleful tale you shall hear." And doleful it is, for it tells of two children, cheated by a wicked uncle, who die in the woods. But justice triumphs, and the villain is caught and sent to prison.

Although the modern reader finds the subjects of these books grim and the constant admonitions depressing, what amazes him most is the difficult vocabulary. A book entitled The Nursery, published in 1880, has a story which begins: "The seal is an amphibious quadruped." True, the words are explained in the next paragraph; nevertheless this is an appalling sentence with which to open a child's story.

The vocabulary of The Little Farmer, a tiny book published in 1817, is equally difficult. The child pictured in the illustrations is only seven or eight, yet here is an example of the language he is supposed to understand: "Although the horse is endowed with vast powers and strength, he seldom exerts either to the prejudice of his master; on the contrary, he shares with him in his labours, and seems to participate in his pleasures: he gives up his whole powers to the service of his master, and not only yields to his hand, but seems to consult the inclination of his rider."

In a slightly lighter vein are the two "indestructible pleasure books," printed on muslin—the rhyme of The Marriage of Cock Robin and Jenny Wren and The Farmer Boy's Alphabet, or Speed the Plough. On alternate pages of the latter, four letters of the alphabet are printed in two-inch type, each with two lines of verse. Although no date of publication is given, the book probably appeared in the first half of the nineteenth century, since the verse for the letter "F," reproduced below, refers to the flail, a tool then still in use. On each facing page, the young farmer-to-be is given information about animals and tools found on a farm. "A Goose," he is told, "is larger than a Duck. It swims in the water, and delights to eat the sweet grass of the pasture. Its feathers are fine and soft, and are used to stuff beds and pillows. The quills plucked from its wings are made into pens and tooth-picks."

Many people now past middle age remember with pleasure the books illustrated by Kate Greenaway. An example of her work in the society's collection is a muslin book entitled Greenaway's Babies. From it, the illustration on page 340 is reproduced. The book is probably a reprint, rather than an original. Each page has a large colored picture of a mother or nurse and one or two children, with a few lines of type above or below.
below. The women are dressed in the empire gowns, capes, and fichus which characterized Miss Greenaway’s pictures. The children, boys and girls alike, are pictured in full skirts and large hats, adorned with lace and ruffles. The clothes worn by the baby boy and nurse here shown are examples.

Generally speaking, the illustrations in these nineteenth-century children’s books are few in number. Those which do appear are colorless and unattractive. Since many of the printing techniques now commonly used in producing juvenile books are twentieth-century developments, most of the pictures appearing in early works for children are crude woodcuts printed in black. When color was used, it was sometimes put on by hand. A large percentage of juvenile books of the last century had no pictures at all, or perhaps only a frontispiece. This is in sharp contrast to present-day children’s books, which emphasize the pictorial approach by using scores of elaborate, colored illustrations. Inquiry at several bookstores revealed that their stocks did not at present include a single unillustrated book for children.

Most juvenile books of yesteryear not only lack pictures and color, but they are surprisingly unattractive in general format. The print is small, the lines are closely spaced, and the margins are narrow. Often the ink blotted on the rough-surfaced paper, adding to the spotty, uninviting appearance of the printed page. In many cases, the paper used is dull gray or tan. Many books consist merely of unrelieved, formidable masses of solid type.

All of the children’s books in the society’s collection are small, the largest measuring about five and a half by seven inches. There are no big, flat volumes, nor any of unusual shape. Also lacking are examples of the quaint, miniature books, which were about the size of a large postage stamp and sold for a penny each. Because of their size, these tiny books were popular nineteenth-century gifts for Christmas stockings.

The children’s books of yesterday in the society’s collection would probably have little appeal for today’s children, accustomed to the glamors of television, three-dimensional movies, and comic books. The ragged and worn condition of many of them, however, indicates that they did appeal to the boys and girls for whom they were intended. They must have been read again and again, and treasured long after their owners had grown up.

In many an old trunk, bureau, or attic examples of the books treasured by yesterday’s children must still exist. Christmas gifts of long ago, like the postage-stamp miniature books, are probably to be found in the homes of many Minnesotans. Perhaps readers of this magazine have some children’s books which they received in their own Christmas stockings. If they would like to see these books preserved, the Minnesota Historical Society would be very happy to have them to amplify its small collection of children’s books of another day.