

# The Idealization of Children in Kingsley's *The Water-Babies*\*

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## Introduction

As one of the masterpieces that launched the first Golden Age of children's literature (1865-1926), *The Water-Babies* is a fantasy novel that encompasses Charles Kingsley's views on education, religion, evolution, industrialization, and other prominent social issues of the Victorian era, and has sparked protracted research and discussion. Its author, Kingsley, has multiple identities as a pastor, writer, social activist, and university professor. He published a large number of works between 1848 and 1875, including novels, dramas, lectures and more, and *The Water-Babies*, published in 1863, is one of his most highly regarded works and is still being reprinted today.

The novel depicts the story of Tom, a poor chimney sweep who becomes a "water-baby" after falling into a river and starts a fantastic journey to St. Brandan's fairy isle, where he receives education and then undergoes many trials, and eventually becomes a grown-up man. Although *The Water-Babies* is a children's book written for his son, it deeply reflects the context of the time, and thus is open to many interpretations. The phrase on the dedication page - "Come read me my riddle" - defines the book as a complicated story in its own right. Many researchers have attempted to decode the book from a variety of perspectives: For example, Humphrey Carpenter's discussion of *The Water-Babies* in *The Secret Garden* is arguably one of the early and most important studies, which points to Kingsley's own repression and sense of guilt about sexuality in the novel. Like Carpenter, many researchers, such as John Hawley and Naomi Wood, have drawn on Kingsley's biography to explore his thoughts on science, faith, and social issues. Among the studies on the scientific issues represented in *The Water-Babies*, Darwin's theory of evolution is the most discussed, and researchers such as Anna Neill and Piers J. Hale have explored the relationship between the book and the theory from a variety of perspectives. Furthermore, given the strong social critique Kingsley shows through Tom's social status and his living conditions, many studies have analyzed the work from social perspectives, such as Catherine Nealy Judd's "Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies*: Industrial England, the Irish Famine, and the American Civil War". In addition, there are also many discussions of the book's genre, writing style, and symbolic imagery. The characterization in *The Water-Babies* is relatively weak especially when it comes to the latter part of story, which is perhaps one of the reasons why there is not enough research on the analysis of Tom as a character. However, from the child characters we are able to see that Kingsley idealizes children, which reflects the influence of Romantic ideas. In this essay, I will focus on Kingsley's portrayal of

children in *The Water-Babies*, exploring the origins of his ideas, the ways in which he idealized children and what this idealization entails. The essay is divided into two parts: the first part explores how the main character Tom is portrayed when he is still on land and how Kingsley idealized children in contrast with adults. I will argue that his portrayal of children reflects Romantic ideas he was strongly influenced by. The second part explores what kind of trials Tom has to go through to become an ideal man after he becomes a water-baby. This part reflects the educational ideals held by Kingsley as a mid-Victorian and his expectations of the ideal social being.

### 1. The Romantic View of Children: The Contrast of the Land-Baby Tom and the Adult Characters

In the first part of *The Water-Babies*, Kingsley establishes children as an ideal mainly through the contrast between child characters with the adult characters. Looking at the characterization of children and the epigrams, we can see that Kingsley's view of children is typically Romantic, that is, they are closely linked with "innocence" and "nature". Therefore, in the first part, *The Water-Babies* portrays children in the language of Romanticism; the ideal child at this stage is characterized by its close relationship with nature, curiosity, susceptibility, honesty and innocence.

The narrative begins with Tom's social identity: he is a little boy who works as a chimney sweep and lives in a northern English town. From the beginning of the story, the author draws out the contrast between children and adults, and shows a distinct value judgment. As a typical child figure, Tom is simple and full of curiosity, and he "cri[es] half his time, and laugh[s] the other half" (2); while Grimes, his master, is the opposite. He is insensitive to everything, and all he cares about is money and alcohol. Tom and Grimes are the only two relatively fleshed out characters in the book, and when Tom is a land-baby, all his actions find a contrast in Grimes.

In *The Water-Babies*, Grimes is a "man of business" (8) who "[i]s not wondering at all" (10), and Tom has just begun to understand and appreciate the outside world. On the way to Sir John's Harthover Place to clean up, while Grimes is totally indifferent to the scenery along the way, Tom "look[s], and look[s]" (6), and "wonder[s] whether anything live[s] in that dark cave, and [comes] out at night to fly in the meadows" (7). Tom is not fully equipped with the concept of "world" or "outside", because he has not been to far-away places and cannot obtain knowledge from books because he is illiterate. When he stands on the top of the mountain for the first time escaping from adults, he cannot help saying, "Why, what a big place the world is!" (33). The world is still new to Tom. Tom's mind is flexible. The beautiful creek has no value for Grimes and it becomes just a place to wash his hair, while for Tom it is fun and worth exploring. Thus, in this book, curiosity and openness are important qualities that children possess but adults have lost.

In addition, susceptibility is another important characteristic that separates Grimes

from Tom. In the book, Grimes is a numbed adult who has perhaps even lost the ability to think. When Sir John thinks Tom is dead, he compensates Grimes with ten pounds and he “dr[inks] it all in a week” (65), not feeling at all sad about Tom’s “death”. Instead of being heartbroken and reflective in the face of the Keeper’s criticism that he would bring down Tom, Grimes “laughed, for he took that for a compliment” (10). Kingsley also criticizes him through the fairy disguised as an Irishwoman, “Are you not ashamed of yourself, Thomas Grimes?” (12), and “No, nor never was yet” (12) is his answer. On the contrary, Tom is very impressionable and sensitive. When he sees a painting of crucified Jesus hanging in a room at Harthover Place, he imagines it to be a memorial to the owner’s kinsman “who had been murdered by the savages in foreign parts”, and then he becomes “sad, and awed” (20). Although Tom does not understand Christianity before he becomes a water-baby, he still intuitively and sensitively perceives the emotions in the painting. When he stands in Ellie’s room and sees how white and clean she is, while he looks like “a little black ape” (21), he “for the first time in his life, f[inds] out that he [i]s dirty; and burst[s] into tears with shame and anger; and turn[s] to sneak up the chimney again and hide” (21). Grimes is intellectually aware of his own filth - that’s why he washes his hair in the creek - but he is emotionally no longer thinking about the meaning of this filth and is numbed enough to accept his current situation; In contrast, Tom is not aware of his own filth, so when he sees his true self as he is, his heart is greatly impacted, even to the point of denial, and this new understanding of himself also contributes to his escape from his environment and his jump into the water. By establishing this strong contrast in *The Water-Babies*, Kingsley is in fact making susceptibility significant, which forms part of his ideal image of children.

In addition, another child character Ellie, the daughter of Tom’s patron Sir John, also forms the image of children portrayed in the book, and she embodies cleanliness and honesty. Although there is not much space for her description, Kingsley deliberately arranges for her to have a conversation with a professor at the seaside. The conversation involves issues of imagination as well as honesty. When they discuss the water-babies, Ellie believes that they do exist, but Professor Pthmlnsprts has “not the least notion of allowing that things [are] true, merely because people th[ink] them beautiful” (123). The narrator even exclaims, “you dear little Ellie, fresh out of heaven! when will people understand that one of the deepest and wisest speeches which came out of a human mouth is that - ‘It is so beautiful, that it must be true’” (94). Although Professor Pthmlnsprts is more learned than Ellie, he is no longer able to imagine nor appreciate beauty without a purpose. When Professor Pthmlnsprts catches Tom and sees a water-baby with his own eyes, he is still reluctant to admit his mistake in front of Ellie, whom he blames, “My dear little maid, you must have dreamt of water-babies last night, your head is so full of them” (126). Anna Neill argues that this illustrates that the adult imagination is stunted (14), but it also shows

how deeply adults are poisoned by dogmatism and cannot acknowledge the truth. Ellie believes what she sees with her own eyes, but Professor Pthmlnsprts's primary reaction when faced with something new and beyond his perception is to refuse to acknowledge it. He is eventually punished severely by the fairies, which exemplifies Kingsley's praise of children's imagination and honesty.

Kingsley's idealization of children is reflected not only in the contrast between children and adults, but also in the description of the adult characters itself. For example, the deployment of the end of Grimes more directly reflects Kingsley's view of childhood as an extremely important stage in life. Grimes's end as a human is to fall into the sea in a brawl and he is then imprisoned by Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid, trapped in a chimney all day and unable to move even an inch. When Tom is unable to pull Grimes out of the chimney, Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid shows up and tells Grimes of his mother's death. Her words evoke memories of Grimes's own childhood and cause him to cry out: "Oh, dear, if I was but a little chap in Vendale again, to see the clear beck, and the apple-orchard, and the yew-hedge, how different I would go on" (151). His tears wash the mortar away from between the bricks, and the chimney collapses. There are similar descriptions in other chapters of the book, such as in the great land of Hearsay, where the inhabitants and an old giant spend their days pointlessly chasing each other, never stopping, "till either he, or they, or both, turn into little children" (141). In other words, adults spend their days in mediocrity, and it is only when they return to childhood that they can end their meaningless chase. Through *The Water-Babies*, Kingsley criticizes the insensitivity, brazenness, rigidity and mediocrity of adults, who contrast with the child characters in the story, setting off the idealization of children. In other words, the children represented by Tom and Ellie are what Kingsley believes people should be like.

Kingsley's idealization of children has its ideological origins. Both the memoirs and biographies of Kingsley show that he had Romantic tendencies and that his view of children was heavily influenced by the Romantics. From 1832, Kingsley studied at a small private school. There, he was taught and influenced by Derwent Coleridge, the third son of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, from whom he attained the spirit of Romanticism. J.M.I. Klaver shows that Kingsley's letters home abounded in scientific enquiry and Shelleyan pantheistic poetic expressions (27). Looking at Kingsley's letters, we are able to see that he held William Wordsworth in the highest esteem: "To me he is not only a poet, but a preacher and prophet of God's new and divine philosophy - a man raised up as a light in a dark time, and rewarded by an honoured age ..." (*Charles Kingsley* 50). Among the eight epigrams in *The Water-Babies*, four are from Wordsworth, which shows his significant influence on Kingsley.

The first chapter begins as follows:

"To her fair works did Nature link  
The human soul that through me ran;

And much it grieved my heart to think,  
What man has made of man.”

—Wordsworth. (3)

The text of *The Water-Babies* begins with the excerpts from “Lines Written in Early Spring”. By personifying Nature, Wordsworth raises his critique of humanity, and his sadness at the destruction of the initial beauty of things. This corresponds to the poor treatment of Tom from his early childhood in the first chapter. Tom was not born destined to spend his days sweeping chimneys and suffering. He should have had a happy childhood, but “what man has made of man”, that is, the heavy labor and oppression of Grimes, makes Tom, one of the “fair works”, destroyed. Thus, Kingsley’s sympathy for Tom is evident even before the story is developed. In the rest of the epigrams, apart from the ones praising religion and nature, we can see the praise for the freedom and vitality of children.

At the beginning of Chapter 6, Kingsley quotes one of his favorite poems, Wordsworth’s “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood”: “Thou little child, yet glorious in the might / Of heaven-born freedom on thy Being’s height” (131). To call it the “Being’s height” reflects the great importance Wordsworth attributes to childhood, for during this period the child has “heaven-born freedom”, a “blessedness” (131), which is gradually lost in the process of growing up. In *The Water-Babies*, Kingsley gives Tom his lost freedom back through his rebirth and Tom regains blessedness through Ellie’s religious teachings in Chapter 6, from where he starts over and begins journey to redeem others.

In the final chapter, Kingsley uses Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s “Come to me, O ye children!” as an epigram. In the poem, Longfellow praises children, especially children’s liveliness, and even writes, “Ye are better than all the ballads / That ever were sung or said, / For ye are living poems, / And all the rest are dead” (177). Here, Longfellow not only places children in a supreme position, but also emphasizes the saving effect of children on all other things. Even he himself is saved by children: “For I hear you at your play; / And the questions that perplexed me / Have vanished quite away” (177). In Chapter 8, Tom sees many mindless creatures, such as the aforementioned old giant and the inhabitants who have been chasing each other senselessly, the “wise men” who “dragged the pond because the moon had fallen into it” (185), and the child obsessed with exams who has turned into an unhappy turnip and finally “split and shrank till nothing was left of him but rind and water” (143). The last “dead thing” is Grimes, who can think of nothing else but smoking. He exploited Tom in the past, but in the end, it is Tom who saves him. The end of Tom’s journey is the prison where Grimes is held, and when Tom meets Grimes, pure compassion makes him forget the mental and financial abuse Grimes has brought him in the past and he tries to pull him out of the chimney. Tom’s act of goodness causes Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid to appear, and his kindness and willingness to help is the key to

Grime's ability to be rescued. Here, Tom becomes an embodiment of the redeeming power Longfellow attributes to children.

Besides "children", "nature" is another key theme that runs through most of these epigrams. From Rousseau onward, the Romantics' perceptions of children and their education were highly related to nature. For example, *Émile* is a work "about a boy being raised in 'rural seclusion' where his naturalness can flourish" (Jones 21). In *The Water-Babies*, Kingsley also inherits the Romantic conception of the relationship between children and nature. The city in the story is a threatening presence for Tom's survival: when Tom is on land, the city he lives in is the embodiment of the capitalism that oppresses him, because all the fruits of his labor are taken by the exploiter Grimes. When Tom, after becoming a water-baby, passes through the cities in his search for a companion, the fairies "shut the sailors' eyes lest they should see him, and turn him aside from millraces, and sewer-mouths, and all foul and dangerous things" (108) in order to prevent him from the risk of being captured and polluted. Even before he becomes a water-baby, he has an innate curiosity and love for nature as he gets his first contact. During his escape from Harthover Place, he travels through the wilderness: "So Tom went on and on, he hardly knew why; but he liked the great wide strange place, and the cool fresh bracing air" (18). Children are endowed with an innate affinity for nature, and this Romantic conception continues to play its role after Tom becomes a water-baby.

In addition, Seyyed Ali Khani Hoolari argues that *The Water-Babies* was influenced by Blake's "The Chimney Sweeper" by pointing out the similarity of the plot, the main characters' names, and the writing techniques (3). Through the setting of similar family backgrounds, the poem and the novel portray two Toms in the same situation of having to stand on their own feet at too early an age. In both works, the protagonists are in an orphan-like situation: in "The Chimney Sweeper", Tom's mother died and his father sold him, while in *The Water-Babies*, Tom's parents are referred to as, "one was dead, and the other was in Botany Bay" (65). Having lost their parents, both of them become chimney sweepers in order to survive. In both works, the authors use irony to write about the misery of the two Toms' lives: in "The Chimney Sweeper," the narrator soothes Tom's heartbreak when his head is shaved: "Hush, Tom! never mind it, for, when your head's bare, / You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair" (43). This consolation reflects that there is no other way to save Tom from his miserable situation. In *The Water-Babies* as well, Tom is the jolliest boy in the whole town "when his master let[s] him have a pull at the leavings of his beer" (2). Lily Gurton-Wachter notes that Blake's innocent poems are not only about happy things, but rather "represent or ventriloquize subjects who are not yet aware of the ways in which they might be, or ought to be, miserable" (592). This analysis can well represent the situation of both Toms when they suffer, and through the description of their "consolation", the image of the poor children who are oppressed by the industrial

society leaps off the page.

To free the children from the misery of child labor, both Blake and Kingsley create fantasy for their protagonists. In Blake's poem, Tom dreams that the thousands of sweepers are rescued by an angel:

Then down a green plain, leaping, laughing, they run  
And wash in a river, and shine in the sun.  
Then naked and white, all their bags left behind,  
They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind,  
And the angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,  
He'd have God for his father, and never want joy. (257)

In his dream, the child laborers are liberated, they are no longer oppressed and they do not have to sweep chimneys anymore. Tom in *The Water-Babies*, on the other hand, arrives at the waterside as if in a dream, falls in, and becomes a water-baby; he, like Tom in the poem, is restored to his freedom.

Looking at the imaginary parts of the both works, we can see that children in real life are always in an oppressed position, and due to the social and cultural environment, they do not have a bright future and cannot find a solution to their problems. But in fantasy, they are transformed back into what children should be: first of all, they are free, and they do not have "masters" anymore. They are no longer forced to work ("all their bags left behind") and they are freed from the shackles of the exploited class. Besides, Blake's poem emphasizes the chimney sweepers "wash in a river", just like Tom in the novel does. Before falling into the river, Tom in *The Water-Babies* even in a half-asleep state, still unconsciously "[saying] out loud again and again, ... 'I must be clean, I must be clean'" (27), and eventually both Toms become "naked and white". Finally, they eventually are redeemed by religion. In the poem, the angel guides Tom to be a child of God, and with the father he is no longer an orphan; while Tom in *The Water-Babies* receives a religious education in St. Brandan's fairy isle and learns to pray under Ellie's teaching. Both works portray children in an ideal state in the form of fantasy. The children regain innocence they were born with and forget pains of the old days. No matter how strongly Blake and Kingsley believe in the ideal innocence of children, such an ideal cannot exist in real life and so they use the dream and the underwater world to envision it. By releasing children from oppression, washing them of their filth and having them to be redeemed by religion, both Blake and Kingsley create a romanticized version of children that could not exist in real life. They believe in the innocence of children's nature and place their ideals in them.

From Kingsley's life and his choice and use of the epigrams, it is clear that his view of children and that of Romanticism have many things in common. Or we can say that Kingsley inherited the Romantic view of children and applied it to his own writing. In the story, the child characters, especially Tom, are given the attribute of being close

to nature, and in contrast with Grimes and other adult characters, have many fine qualities represented by innocence. Through the use of epigrams and characterization of children, Kingsley realizes the idealization of children in the book. And behind this idealization there lies a critique of adults and the city they created. When Tom is still a land-baby, we can already see the Romantic view of children in him; when he becomes a water-baby, he returns to the original state of children in a physical sense.

## 2. The Completion of the Ideal: The Water-Baby Tom's Religious and Moral Education

In *The Water-Babies*, the second stage of Tom's growth starts after he becomes a water-baby. Tom's rebirth, which implies the Christian meaning of baptism, restores him to his original state as a child, the state that best represents "innocence" in the Romantic context. The novel also shifts the focus of the narrative from Tom's emancipation to his education. At this point, Kingsley's concern shifts from "the child as an ideal" to "how to educate the child," which gives the novel a more didactic flavor.

The shift in focus is mainly due to the change in the environment. Jessica Webb argues that Tom's "metamorphosis allows him to embrace nudity, implying that the child has reached a newfound state of ignorance and a higher spiritual status. As a result, Tom is now able to begin a process of re-education" (90). Tom's state under water can be divided into two stages: the first stage is when he has just entered the water, alone, without companions and not affiliated with any group; the second stage is when he finds other water-babies, goes with them to St. Brandan's fairy isle, becomes a resident of the island, and begins to receive education. When Tom has not yet met other water-babies, he survives in a state of nature as a "natural man" or the "original man" in Rousseau's sense (*The Spirit of Laws* 330, 331). He is no longer a member of British society, but a free man, unaware of the existence of other water-babies. When we observe Tom's life in the water, we can see that he is free from positive law of human society and is no longer a social being along these lines. He can simply obey natural law and try to survive. In Tom there is what Rousseau called "the only natural virtue" that natural man possesses (*The Spirit of Laws* 343): compassion.

From the depiction in the book, Kingsley is in agreement with Tom's compassion. Before going to St. Brandan's fairy isle, we can see Tom actively helps his friends in the sea, tells the salmon where the otters are so that they don't get caught by them and tries to help his lobster friend escape from the cage. However, he does not hold the same view as Rousseau regarding Tom's character defects. According to Rousseau, Tom's mischievous nature disperses when he loses his identity as a social being, for when a man is a natural man, he "[can] not be either good or bad, virtuous or vicious" (*The Spirit of Laws* 343). Kingsley, however, is critical of this and believes that Tom should change his bad habits. Living in a time described by Rousseau as "the decrepitude of the species" (*The Spirit of Laws* 351-52), becoming a natural man is

not Kingsley's educational ideal. It is not realistic or effective, for his didactic purpose, to keep Tom in the first stage.

When Tom finds companions and goes to the island where lots of water-babies live in, his identity must change with his state of existence - Tom changes from a natural man to a social being (i.e. a citizen of the island). When the social context in which Tom lives is transformed from a human society to a fictional island governed by fairies, Kingsley is able to exercise his educational ideals to the fullest, and Tom's re-education becomes feasible.

At the core of the underwater world is St. Brandan's fairy isle. In the novel, it is located in the southwest of Ireland and was discovered by the hermit, St. Brandan and his friends:

They found it overgrown with cedars and full of beautiful birds; and he sat down under the cedars and preached to all the birds in the air. And they liked his sermons so well that they told the fishes in the sea; and they came, and St. Brandan preached to them; and the fishes told the water-babies ... and St. Brandan got quite a neat little Sunday-school. (142)

It provides a home for the water-babies who suffered on land. Here, although the water-babies still live a group life, there is no longer any class distinction between them and there is no adult authority, so there is no exploitation and oppression as on land. In addition, the water-babies' survival will not be threatened, because the island has no cold, hunger and other crises, and there are sea snakes to protect their safety. More importantly, those poor water-babies who suffered a lot on land are finally able to gain the spiritual support that they have not experienced before.

On St. Brandan's fairy isle, the fairies and the other water-babies begin to act as spokespersons for Kingsley and begin to educate Tom. From Tom's development underwater, we can tell that Kingsley's education of children was empirical and Lockean. According to Locke, the mind is like a blank sheet at birth, and the environment then imprinted upon the mind which gives birth to sensation and reflection (Ediger 36). The re-education of Tom begins on the basis that he has been baptized into a *tabula rasa*. We cannot see in the book that Tom has any talent that comes with rebirth; he is educated like a receptacle of Kingsley's ideals and his personality is refined during the process of education.

Looking at the learning process that Kingsley arranged for Tom, we are able to see the influence Rousseau had on him in terms of education. In one of his representative works, *Émile, or On Education*, the main character Émile no longer lives in the era of "natural man", so Rousseau's focus of discussion changes from the ideal man in an ideal state of existence to the cultivation of an ideal man in a corrupt society. In this society, Emile cannot be a natural man for life, so Rousseau sets different educational goals for him at different ages, which draws on many of Locke's ideas. Like Locke, Rousseau explored social justice from a moral point of view and was heavily influenced

by Locke in the protection of the infant body, physical education, and home education. He refers to Locke several times in *Émile*, and he gives Émile “what is in essence Locke’s teaching on property” (13). *The Water-Babies* also touches on aspects such as the protection of Tom’s weak body, so we can still see Locke’s influence here, but it is Rousseau’s moral education that Kingsley inherited the most obviously in this stage. In his *The Ancien Regime*, he praised *Émile* as “awaken[ing] throughout civilised Europe a conception of education just, humane, rational, truly scientific, because founded upon facts” (72). The ways Rousseau nurtures Émile includes moral education, and his goal is to make the child “both free and moral” (27). Rousseau puts forward some specific requirements in his treatise, for example: “[t]he moral education of the young Émile is, ... limited to the effective establishment of the rule that he should harm no one” (15), but Kingsley takes a more abstract approach, which points to not commands, but at principles. In addition, as a clergyman, Kingsley places extreme importance on religious education.

In St. Brandan’s fairy isle, Tom meets three “teachers” who bring him education: Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid, Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby and Ellie. Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid and Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby are both fairies, actually two persons in one, who give Tom moral guidance. Ellie becomes another of Tom’s teachers, teaching him the foundations of Christianity.

The depiction of Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid and her actions is full of didacticism. It is clear from her name that she teaches Tom that all actions have their due consequences. After Tom arrives at St. Brandan’s fairy isle, he often plays pranks with the animals there: “he tickled the madrepoes, to make them shut up; and frightened the crabs, to make them hide in the sand and peep out at him with the tips of their eyes; and put stones into the anemones’ mouths, to make them fancy that their dinner was coming” (90). Based on what Tom does, Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid throws “a nasty cold hard pebble” (121) into his mouth while other water-babies received all sorts of nice sea-things. Not just Tom or the other water-babies, but all the people will pay the price for their bad behavior in the end. Tom sees Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid “[call] up all the careless nurserymaids, and [stick] pins into them all over, and [wheel] them about in perambulators with tight straps across their stomachs and their heads and arms hanging over the side, till they [are] quite sick and stupid, and [will] have had sunstrokes” (93). After experiencing evil consequences, Tom stops playing pranks and learns to live in harmony with the sea animals. As a result, he receives favors of Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby. Thus, when Tom does evil, he has his punishment; and when he becomes moral, he reaps benefits. Under Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid’s education, Tom constantly learns from experience and develop good virtues.

Tom’s second teacher is Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby. If Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid deals with past behavior, then Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby’s teaching is geared toward changing Tom’s future. Under her education, what you will do is more

important than what you have done. After tasting the consequences of his wrongdoings, Tom is always trying to change his bad behavior, but in doing so his focus will always be on himself and how he benefits himself. Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby makes up for his lack of a happy childhood with hugs and love, and shows him, as her name implies, to treat others as you would like to be treated, which becomes the motivation for him to do good from his heart: “[S]he took Tom in her arms, and laid him in the softest place of all, and kissed him, and patted him, and talked to him, tenderly and low, such things as he had never heard before in his life; and Tom looked up into her eyes, and loved her, and loved, till he fell fast asleep from pure love” (96). According to Kingsley, “The expression of love produces happiness; therefore, the more perfect the expression the greater the happiness” (*Charles Kingsley* 232), and this spiritual happiness is something that Tom could never experience on land. Therefore, with the promotion of the value of “love”, Kingsley wants Tom to learn to be loved by loving others.

When he first becomes a water-baby, Tom forgets everything and recovers his nature to the greatest extent possible, but there is also a naughty part of his nature. Kingsley’s attitude toward this is that “whether it is nature or not, little boys can help it, and must help it” (42). This reflects the fact that as a Victorian, Kingsley valued moral values as much as his contemporaries. According to *Charles Kingsley: His Letters and Memories of his Life*, Kingsley’s friend Muller calls him a moralist (241), and another friend Kegan Paul states that “there was always in what he told or what he suffered himself to hear, a good and pure moral underlying what might be coarse in expression” (91). And as a priest, one of Kingsley’s prayers was to “see God, see Him for myself as a one and accountable moral being for ever” (*Charles Kingsley* 182). In *The Water-Babies*, the approach Kingsley gives to moral education is not a list of specific rules, but rather a way for children to be able to learn to give while disciplining themselves; the former lecture that Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid deliver involves more self-cultivation, while what Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby teaches contains more optimism and altruism.

Most importantly, Ellie, the third teacher Kingsley arranges for Tom, brings him a religious education. In spite of good councils of Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid and Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby, Tom still cannot restrain his gluttony, which is one of the Seven Deadly Sins, and suffers the consequence severely. he becomes “all over prickles, just like a sea-egg” (102) from secretly eating sea-bullseyes and sea-lollipops. Tom was originally a non-religious child, and without someone to teach him, he could not even pray. Ellie, who has also become a water-baby, teaches Tom “first, what you [readers] ha[ve] been taught ever since you said your first prayers at your mother’s knees” (103), which fills in an important part of Kingsley’s religious ideas. As a broad church priest of the Church of England, Kingsley remains a strong believer despite doubts of his youth. The importance of “prayer” in *The Water-Babies* as

Tom's first contact with Christianity is due to the fact that in practice, Kingsley also regarded prayer as an extremely important way of contacting God. In his biography of Kingsley, J.M.I. Klaver points out that Kingsley and his wife Fanny "[specified] duties and prayers from hour to hour, steering clear of anything that might savour of self-indulgence or 'fineries'" (75), and that "prayer was important to Kingsley throughout his life" (76). In Kingsley's own letters, he used to exclaim: "What an awful weapon prayer is! ... [it] saved me from madness in my twelve months' sorrows; and it is so simple, and so wide - wide as eternity, simple as light, true as God Himself" (*Charles Kingsley* 37). Based on his awareness of the significance and role of prayer in faith, Kingsley inspires to value the power of prayer in the novel. Being introduced to Christianity, all the prickles in Tom's body disappears after a period of study. And in the subsequent journey, Tom overcomes many challenges, which echoes what Kingsley once said: "With the prayer of faith we can do anything" (Klaver 77).

After learning about moral codes and religious beliefs, Tom reaches the final stage of education, namely becoming independent, which is a lesson that Tom needs to teach himself. Mrs. Bedonebyasyouidid tells Tom,

[H]e had been in the nursery long enough, and must go out now and see the world, if he intended ever to be a man; and how he must go all alone by himself, as every one else that ever was born has to go, and see with his own eyes, and smell with his own nose, and make his own bed and lie on it, and burn his own fingers if he put them into the fire. (107)

Then, Tom goes on a journey alone, reaching the Shiny Wall, meeting Mother Carey and learning from her about the way to the Other-end-of-Nowhere, passing through one strange country after another, and finally meeting Grimes. After all this, Tom also completes his own re-education, and when he sees Ellie again, they realize that both have grown up. Thus, we can see that Kingsley considers moral and religious education and self-growth are crucial to the ideal citizen under the ideal society.

However, Kingsley's treatment of the final image of Tom is very vague. At the end of the story, Kingsley only gives three pieces of information about Tom: he grows up, returns to land, and becomes "a great man of science" (156). The description in the final part is so rushed and sketchy that we barely register that Tom is a grownup. Carpenter even says, "Tom himself never develops into anything; he remains in effect a baby" (38). This unconvincing ending, in Lila Marz Harper's opinion, is also related to the value standards of the times: "Victorian middle-class readers tended to focus on moral positions and a lack of narrative consistency was seen as less of a problem" (123). In addition, we find that the adult Tom is just abstractly described as a scientist. The issues that Kingsley criticizes most fiercely in this children's book, such as the living condition of working-class, child labor, and environmental pollution, are not at all touched upon. Tom is vaguely described to thrive thanks to "what he learnt when he was a water-baby" (156). The ending hollows out both Tom's adult identity and

the land to which he returns. It could be that because Victorian England could not have provided a space for the ideal man Tom, Kingsley's final portrayal "real" world which Tom returns to actually becomes as fantastic as the underwater world.

This may be the reason why Kingsley chose the form of fantasy for this children's book. Tom's progress does not take place as a *Bildungsroman*, or as a "Rags to Riches Story" with realist settings, as many works of Kingsley's contemporaries, such as Horatio Alger, did. Kingsley's choice to tell Tom's story in the genre of fantasy allows Tom to become the ideal image of the child that Kingsley has in mind, and also enables the author to show Tom's characteristics after his rebirth in a freer form and to arrange the perfect education for him. Kingsley must have recognized that the ideal child and the ideal educational approach were not feasible in the society of the time. This may reflect the nature of Kingsley's reformism. He cannot believe in the change of the existing social system but would not like to deny the possibility for reform completely, and in this oscillation, we can see Kingsley's ambivalence as a typical mid-Victorian.

Taken together with Part 1, we find that the re-education of Tom does not mean a break and subversion of the original Romantic idealization of children, but an upgrade. Through two different states of existence, i.e. as a land-baby and as a water-baby, Kingsley shows us the idealization of the child Tom in both real and imaginary dimensions. The age span he is in, namely childhood, is shaped into the best period of one's life through the salvation and remorse of the adult characters, while his identity, a child, becomes ideal in contrast to the adult characters, with the innocent nature highly praised by the Romantics. In the water, Tom's species and social identity change. In order to be able to integrate into a more idealized society, he acquires moral and religious knowledge, and undergoes a series of challenges that eventually lead him to recognition. Kingsley takes his idealization of children further in a fantasy world by re-educating Tom to become a complete human being and grow up, even though in an abstract sense. This turns the book into a fantasy novel with a more educational dimension, reflecting the combination of both imaginative and didactic trends in Victorian children's books.

## Note

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