

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-48726-0 - Children's Books of Yesterday
John Masefield
Excerpt
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Introduction

Most of the books in this exhibition originally formed the collection of the late F. R. Bussell. They were sold at Sotheby's on February 3, 1945, and were purchased as a collection by Elkin Mathews Ltd. on behalf of the National Magazine Co., by whose courtesy they are now exhibited. The Beatrix Potter exhibit has been made possible by the generosity of her executors and of her publishers—Frederick Warne & Co., Ltd. The games, jig-saw puzzles, and peep-shows are from my own collection.

The lay-out and type design of the catalogue are the work of Mr. Robert Harling.

In preparing the catalogue I have referred to the following books :—

- F. J. Harvey Darton. *Children's Books in England*. Cambridge University Press, 1932.
- E. M. Field. *The Child and His Book*. Wells, Gardner, 1891.
- A. W. Tuer. *Pages and Pictures from Forgotten Children's Books*. Leadenhall Press, 1898-9.
- Gumuchian. *Les Livres de l'Enfance du XV^e au XIX^e Siecle*. 2 vols. Gumuchian et Cie. Paris, N.D.
- C. Welsh. *A Bookseller of the Last Century. Being some Account of the Life of John Newbery*. Griffith, Farran, etc., 1885.
- T. Hugo. *The Bewick Collector*. 2 vols. Reeve, 1866-68.
- A. S. W. Rosenbach. *Early American Children's Books*. Portland, Maine, 1933.

P. H. MUIR

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PART I

Instructional

F. J. HARVEY DARTON begins his charming book on *Children's Books** by defining terms:— 'By "Children's books"' he writes, 'I mean printed works produced ostensibly to give children spontaneous pleasure, and not primarily to teach them, nor solely to make them good, nor to keep them *profitably* quiet.' To observe that Darton's own book, not to mention the major portion of the present exhibition, is an elaborate confutation of this definition is rendered superfluous by the qualifications with which Darton concludes his first paragraph—'The definition is given as a broad principle liable to perpetual exception.' Those who plough patiently through the books now exhibited may well conclude that the exceptions to his rule are too frequent to serve as proof of it, rather they call for its abandonment.

Darton's definition, in fact, misses the point that books are most frequently provided for children by their elders. Among the motives of these elders is undoubtedly "to give children spontaneous pleasure," but the motive of most parents is not single in this respect and surely one test of the suitability of their choice is that it shall keep the child quiet, although whether "profitably" or not is a secondary consideration.

* F. J. Harvey Darton. *Children's Books in England*. Cambridge University Press. 1932.

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Be that as it may, unless the book consists wholly or mainly of pictures, it is useless to a child who cannot read. This must be sufficient excuse for the nature of this first section of our exhibition, which endeavours to show a skeleton of the history of instructional literature. We begin with

SECTION I: THE ALPHABET

An early form of which was the Horn-book. This consisted of a paper or vellum rectangle on which was printed the alphabet and a few simple words. This was laid down on a piece of wood, which was provided with a handle, and the lettering was protected by a sheet of transparent horn, similar to that used in early lanterns—or lanthorns. The method may have originated in the sixteenth century; the earliest use of the word quoted in the Oxford Dictionary is from Shakespeare, *Love's Labour Lost*, 1589, but Mrs. Field* mentions the grant of a licence for a "Horne A B C" to John Wolfe in about 1587.

"Horn-books" were also made of pewter, in which the letters were punched, and also of silver with letters handsomely engraved. All early horn-books are exceedingly rare and genuine specimens are seldom met with outside museums. Most of those offered for sale nowadays are fakes. We have, therefore, had to content ourselves with a genuine specimen from the first quarter of the nineteenth century (see No. 1), of about the

* *The Child and His Book*. Wells, Gardner, pp. 114-5.

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time when horn-books were giving way to Battledores.

The name of Battledore is taken from the secondary use to which children put their horn-books. Our specimen of the latter is rather stylized, but earlier examples are in size and shape eminently suited and were inevitably converted into bats for shuttlecocks. We show two groups of Battledores of different periods (Nos. 2 and 3).

A B C's for children existed before horn-books, indeed, a few years ago a "parcel" of numerous copies of a single-sheet alphabet, printed in Leipzig in about 1544, was discovered in new condition—among the oldest "remainders" on record. The sheet was headed *Tabulae Abcdariae Pueriles*, and comprised three alphabets, a *Tabula Syllabarum* and the Paternoster. Even earlier than this alphabets had been introduced into breviaries, on which there is a note in the next sub-section, under "Primers."

Our range of alphabets is unambitious by comparison, extending no further back than the second half of the eighteenth century, but thenceforward it is representative of developments during the subsequent hundred years or so.

- 1 A HORN-BOOK OF THE FIRST QUARTER OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.
- 2 A SELECTION OF BATTLEDORES, *ca.* 1810-1825. Risher of Banbury and Davison of Alnwick were noted publishers of chap-books for children. (See Part III, Section i).
- 3 A SELECTION OF BATTLEDORES OF A LATER PERIOD. *ca.* 1850. An apparently unsuccessful attempt to revive the method.

- 4 ALPHABETS. A SERIES OF FRENCH LESSON CARDS BEGINNING WITH ALPHABETS AND PROCEEDING THROUGH SYLLABLES AND SIMPLE WORDS TO GRADUATED READING LESSONS. [18th century].
- 5 THE ENIGMATICAL ALPHABET, OR TWENTY-FIVE PUZZLES FOR A CURIOUS BOY OR GIRL. *Salisbury* : C. Fellows. *London* : J. Wallis. [ca. 1790]. Puzzle verses, the answer to each being a letter of the alphabet. "J" is omitted in accordance with its synonymy with "I" in the minds of printers.
- 6 THE ALPHABET IN VERSE. *Darton & Harvey*, 1800.
- 7 A SET OF COLOURED FLOWERS AND THE ALPHABET FOR LITTLE CHILDREN. *Darton & Harvey*, 1800.
- 8 R. R. THE INVITED ALPHABET, OR ADDRESS OF A TO B, CONTAINING HIS FRIENDLY PROPOSAL FOR THE AMUSEMENT AND INSTRUCTION OF GOOD CHILDREN. *Darton*, 1808. With 26 engraved plates of the Alphabet, the central figures of which are demonstrating the deaf and dumb alphabet. The captions constitute a simple story in verse, the purpose of which is to invite the Alphabet to assemble so that good children may learn to spell and read.
- 9 R. R. THE ASSEMBLED ALPHABET; OR ACCEPTANCE OF A'S INVITATION . . . BEING A SEQUEL TO THE "INVITED ALPHABET." *Darton*, 1813. A Sequel to the foregoing, in which the letters of the alphabet gather in "abcdary coalition" with the desired effect—or so the concluding verses assure us.

- 10 PICTURE ALPHABET. *ca.* 1810. This picture sheet appears to be a development of the Battledore.
- 11 ALPHABET (A COLOURED PICTORIAL). *ca.* 1810 Engraved throughout, with coloured frontispiece, 26 coloured plates of the Alphabet on 7 pages and 8 coloured plates of the story of an industrious apprentice.
- 12 THE AMUSING ALPHABET FOR YOUNG CHILDREN BEGINNING TO READ. *Taylor*, 1812. With 25 full-page engravings and a story to each letter of the alphabet, the title of which begins with that letter.
- 13 THE HISTORICAL ALPHABET. *Harris*, 1812. Engraved throughout with 26 full-page coloured plates of scenes from English History.
- 14 W. BELCH'S NEW AND AMUSING ALPHABET. *ca.* 1815. Belch was an early recruit to the penny plain, twopence coloured school of publishing and issued juvenile dramas, tinsel pictures and the like.
- 15 THE MURRAY ALPHABET ; OR PLEASING PICTURES. *Blake*, *ca.* 1815. With 12 rather crudely coloured engravings.
- 16 CLASSICAL LETTERS, OR ALPHABET OF MEMORY ; INTENDED FOR THE INSTRUCTION AND AMUSEMENT OF YOUNG GENTLEMEN. *Harris*, 1817. With frontispiece and 23 full-page plates in colour. An ambitious but unsuccessful attempt at erudition.
- 17 GOOD CHILD'S REWARD (THE), OR A SCRIPTURAL ALPHABET IN VERSES FOR CHILDREN . . . *Chelmsford : Marden*, *ca.* 1820. Two illustrated alphabets, one with verses.

- 18** THE GALLOPING GUIDE TO THE A B C, OR THE CHILD'S AGREEABLE INTRODUCTION TO A KNOWLEDGE OF THE ALPHABET. *Banbury : Rusher, ca. 1820.* A penny chap-book alphabet.
- 19** MRS. LOVECHILD'S GOLDEN PRESENT, FOR ALL GOOD LITTLE BOYS AND GIRLS. *York : Kendrew, ca. 1820.* A common usage of the "Dame" notion so popular with publishers and effective with children.
- 20** AN ALPHABETICAL ARRANGEMENT OF ANIMALS FOR LITTLE NATURALISTS. BY SALLY SKETCH. *Harris, 1821.* A most charming A.B.C, engraved throughout, in colour, with frontispiece, title, and 26 plates.
- 21** FLORA'S ALPHABET : OR THE GOOD CHILD'S FLOWER GARDEN. *Hodgson, 1822.* With a coloured engraved title and 24 half-page coloured engravings of flowers.
- 22** THE LIFE AND DEATH OF AN APPLE-PIE. *Carvalho, ca. 1825.* One of the most favoured of all alphabets. There is a version by Kate Greenaway (See 723b) and the verses are still popular with modern children.
- 23** A B C. PETER PARLEY'S PRIMER, AND LADDER TO LEARNING, OR ALPHABET IN VERSE. *Lacey, ca. 1835.* With 24 coloured cuts, one to each letter of the alphabet. The original Peter Parley was Samuel Griswold Goodrich, born at Ridgefield, Connecticut, in 1793. He had at least six imitators in England, who assumed his popular pseudonym. Edward Lacey, publisher of the present volume, was one of the first.

- 24** OSBOURNE (CHARLES, JUN.). A PICTORIAL ALPHABET. *Osbourne and Ackermann*, 1840. With booklet of explanation, engraved title and 26 pretty engravings, each on a separate card and each a representation of a letter of the alphabet, in pictorial form.
- 25** ALPHABET (A FRENCH AND ENGLISH), IN PANORAMA FORM. *ca.* 1840. 25 plates and one on the cover.
- 26** THE ALPHABET OF EXCITEMENT. *Harwood*, *ca.* 1840. An alphabet in which the subjects are portrayed in the shape or attitude of letters. The plates are lithographic.
- 27** PAPA'S GIFT FOR A GOOD CHILD. *Johnson*, *ca.* 1840. Coloured woodcut title and pictorial alphabet.
- 28** A B C FOR THE NURSERY. *ca.* 1840. With 26 coloured woodcuts.
- 29** [A PICTORIAL ALPHABET]. *ca.* 1840. A single sheet folded to 8 pp., in colour.
- 30** THE MODERN PICTURE ALPHABET OF CURIOSITIES. *March*, *ca.* 1840. A picture alphabet and first reader
- 31** THE SPELLING BEE : A LETTERS-TRY GAME. *ca.* 1850. An early version of "Word-Taking and Word-Making," "Lexicon," etc. Observe the atrocious pun in the title.
- 32** PRINCE ARTHUR'S ALPHABET ; OR, A WAS AN ARCHER. *Dean*, *ca.* 1850. An ambitious and fairly successful "moveable."
- 33** [AN ALLITERATIVE ALPHABET IN PANORAMIC FORM. *ca.* 1850]. The perplexities of the letter X are not shirked.

- 34** THE NEW LONDON ALPHABET, in Rhyme, with 28 pictures of the Principal Places in that far-famed City. *Darton*, [ca. 1850].
- 34a** DEAN'S STEAMBOAT ALPHABET. ca. 1850. This may be rolled off in panoramic form taking the reader through a journey by steamboat.
- 35** THE A B C OF ALL NATIONS. ca. 1860. Flat wooden blocks with a coloured pictorial alphabet on one side and plain block capitals on the other.
- 36** THE NURSERY LIBRARY ALPHABET. *Routledge*, ca. 1860. The complete "library" of twelve volumes progresses through A Spelling Book and A Reading Book, to Natural History, Games, and finally, "Hymns and Songs."
- 37** THE CHILD'S OWN ALPHABET AND OBJECT LESSONS. *Darton*, ca. 1860.
- 38** RAILWAY A.B.C. *Warne*, ca. 1865. Printed in oil colours by Kronheim & Co., who held a licence from George Baxter.
- 39** LES ALPHABETS AMUSANTS. No. 2. ALPHABET DU PETIT MARQUIS . . . ca. 1870. A French picture alphabet in panorama form.
- 40** THE NOAH'S ARK ALPHABET. *Routledge*, [1872]. An early example of the work of Walter Crane. Each picture is signed with the familiar rebus.
- 41** THE ALPHABET OF GAMES. *Warne*, ca. 1875.
- 42** TOM THUMB'S ALPHABET. Illustrated by W. McConnell. Engraved by the Brothers Dalziel. *Bogue*, ca. 1880.

SECTION II: THE THREE R's

(a) **Reading.** This section includes the earliest book in the exhibition, the first English translation of Calvin's "Catechism" (No. 43). There is ample evidence that the earliest reading books for children were works of religious instruction. A "Primer," or "Prymer," was originally a breviary, but in the latter half of the fourteenth century, before the invention of printing in the western world, Chaucer's reference in the *Prioress' Tale* to a child at school learning his letters from "his prymer" shows the use it commonly served. In about 1537 was published *The Primer in English most necessary for the education of children*, which included one leaf containing the A B C. The "Shorter Catechism" was the other favoured book for this purpose, and the title-page of Crespin's translation of Calvin leaves no shadow of doubt that his book was expressly intended for the instruction of children, although he may have considered reading merely incidental to salvation.

- 43** CALVIN (JOHN). THE CATECHISME OR MANNER TO TEACHE CHILDREN THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION, WHEREIN THE MINISTER DEMANDETH THE QUESTION, AND THE CHILDE MAKETH ANSWERE. MADE BY THE EXCELLENT DOCTOR AND PASTOR IN CHRISTES CHURCHE, JOHN CALVIN. [*Geneva*] *By John Crespin*, 1556. The first English translation of Calvin's Catechism. This was used not only to teach children their religious duties, but also as a reading book. It is the earliest book in the exhibition, only two other copies are