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Alexander Law

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*Alexander Law*

## Scottish Schoolbooks of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries



The characteristic feature of Scottish education in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was the influence of the Presbyterian Church. The Act for Settling of Schools passed by the Scottish Parliament in 1696 confirmed the duty assumed by the Church of Scotland at the Reformation to see that schools were provided in every parish. These schools, along with the High Schools long established in the burghs, constituted a fairly well structured system from the early eighteenth century in which the parish minister's position was very important. He visited the parish schools regularly, and also kept in touch in their homes with parents and pupils. In towns various kinds of private and charity schools, and in country areas remote from parish schools, schools set up by bodies like the Society in Scotland for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, all were visited and helped by ministers. This, with local variations, was the condition of Scottish education until the Education (Scotland) Act of 1872 established publicly elected School Boards to organize and develop schools. Even then, though direct control by the Church had gone, its influence persisted and can be noted in the schoolbooks popularly used in Scottish schools at the time.

Practically all the schoolbooks used in Scottish schools in the eighteenth century were printed and published, and many

were written, in Scotland. Towards the end of that century, and in the early years of the following one, several publishers who were to become well-known in England and overseas had become established. In Edinburgh, Oliver and Boyd (1778), Nelson (1798), and Chambers (1819), and in Glasgow, Blackie (1809) and Collins (1821), built up large international businesses. Interestingly too, a group of Scottish teachers formed a kind of cooperative in 1817, the Scottish School-Book Association, to provide their own schools with the texts they felt were needed. At all times textbooks from England were widely used in Scottish schools.

It is the purpose of this study to look at these school-books in three main groupings: first, the ABC, Shorter Catechism, and Bible used in practically all schools to teach the elements of reading; then the Spelling Books, by which vocabulary was enlarged and tested; and finally the Collections of extracts which constituted the reading material provided for most pupils. Study of this material may help to illumine the traditional background of reading and learning of most Scottish boys and girls in the two centuries after 1700.

#### THE A,B,C, SHORTER CATECHISM, AND BIBLE

In the early eighteenth century, and, indeed, for a hundred years and more thereafter, Scottish boys and girls learned to read from the A,B,C, the Shorter Catechism, and the Bible. The A,B,C in capital letters and in lower case was printed on the *verso* of the title-page of *The Shorter Catechism*: that title-page runs as follows:

*The A,B,C, with the Shorter Catechism agreed upon by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster, and appointed by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, to be a Directory for Catechising of such as are of weaker Capacity.*

This title reminds us that *The Shorter Catechism* was drawn up by an Assembly at Westminster of representatives of the reformed churches of England and Scotland, and an *A,B,C, and Catechism* was actually published in Scotland in 1644 while that Assembly was still sitting. The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland sanctioned its use in schools in 1648. The encouragement of reading, and in that connection the study of Catechism and Bible, formed part of the basic beliefs of the Presbyterian Church. Men and women, the Church held, should be able to read the Bible for themselves, and ministers and their Kirk Sessions regarded it as part of their duty to see

that this was done. A similar emphasis was laid on what were called "the principles of religion," or, in other words, *The Shorter Catechism*, that codified expression and summary of the Church's faith. And it was convenient to have *A, B, C*, and *Shorter Catechism* in one little book.

From the page of the *A, B, C*, the child began the painful process of learning the letters. First they learned to recognize the letters and to name them--Ay, Bee, Cee, Dee, and so on, and when these were known they turned to simple groupings of vowels and consonants like:

Ab eb ib ob ub  
ac ec ic oc uc  
ad ed id od ud &c.

These groupings were learned as Ay-bee, Ee-bee, &c. first along the lines and then down, the letters read aloud or chanted by groups of children. Only after the letters were known, did they turn to words. The letters were named by the pupil, and the teacher supplied the pronunciation, which was repeated, usually loudly. The difficulty of big words was met by dividing them into syllables: the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge supplied "syllabicated Catechisms," which came to be in common use. There is an amusing reference to syllabicated texts in S.W. Carruthers' detailed study of *The Shorter Catechism*,<sup>1</sup> where he quotes from the Rev. John Anderson of Dumbarton, who in 1700 devised a course of study: "Catechism, Proverbs, Psalm-book, Chapter-book...and Bible," in which at the early stages the texts were syllabicated. One wonders what experience lay behind Mr. Anderson's introductory note: "No woman should be allowed to teach, or at least none but those who are known to understand syllabication. They are generally under no favourable character for their skill in spelling."

In private schools other little books were also used. John Porterfield, a well-known private teacher in Edinburgh, advertised a little book in 1694, the title of which indicates that he followed the syllabication method:

*A choice jewel for children, or, A firm and basic foundation, laid for Reading of the sacred scriptures; with the shorter Catechism (appointed by the General Assembly) in syllables, whereby such may attain to true spelling, and the ready reading of the Catechism, and scriptures, or any Latine or English book, comprehended in a few lessons, never extant before.*<sup>2</sup>

In another book Porterfield is equally optimistic: *Edinburgh's English schoolmaster, or, magnum in parvo, containing in few lessons an easy way to spell, or read, either Latin or English* (Edinburgh, 1706).<sup>3</sup> He claimed to be able to teach children of six years of age "to read Latin being altogether ignorant of their mother tongue...in eight or nine months time, provided they be of ordinary capacity; also those of my own scholars, having the true English pronunciation may be forthwith taught in six weeks, or two months at most, to read Latin without any hesitation." By his reference to Latin he probably meant no more than the ability to say Latin words by recognizing the letters, which would be a useful attainment for little boys who were going on to the city's High School.

For most scholars in parish schools, private schools, charity schools, and what were called in England Dame schools, *The Shorter Catechism* and the Bible formed the staple diet. *The Shorter Catechism* consists of 107 questions and answers, of which the first items are the following:

- Question 1. What is the chief end of man?  
 Answer. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.
- Question 2. What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?  
 Answer. The word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.
- Question 3. What do the Scriptures principally teach?  
 Answer. The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.
- Question 4. What is God?  
 Answer. God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.
- Question 5. Are there more Gods than one?  
 Answer. There is but one only, the living and true God.

As far as learning to read is concerned, there is much that is simple in these impressive words, but also much that is difficult. Probably the only way to teach little children to recognize and pronounce words like *chief*, *contained*, *principally*, *power*, was by rote learning and constant repetition, which conjures up a picture of endless boredom for many, and meaningless chanting of words and sentences for others. And these opening Questions and Answers are among the simplest in *The*

*Shorter Catechism.* When we reach Question 31, however, we find an explanation of faith difficult to understand, and, for a child, difficult to read:

Question 31. What is effectual calling?

Answer. Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.

Question 32. What benefits do they that are effectually called partake of in this life?

Answer. They that are effectually called do in this life partake of justification, adoption, and sanctification, and the several benefits which, in this life, do either accompany or flow from them.

An older child could read these words and perhaps grasp faintly at their meaning, and one can well imagine clever little girls and boys getting pleasure out of being able to recite even the whole 107 questions and answers, but as a reading book for children of six or seven years *The Shorter Catechism* poses awkward problems. It was probably a relief to turn to the simpler prose of Proverbs: "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways and be wise, which, having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep" (6:6-10). There are problems for beginners in reading even that beautiful simple passage, but the pictures in the mind are familiar and practical. It was also an advantage for parents and teachers that the moral precepts in this and many other verses in Proverbs provided useful ammunition in time of need.

Ministers realized at an early date that it was difficult to teach the "principles of religion" through *The Shorter Catechism* alone, and many "Explications" of the Catechism were published, some of which have been in use until comparatively recent times. The S.S.P.C.K. (Society in Scotland for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge) presented in the early 1720's copies of Thomas Vincent's *Explicatory Catechism* of 1673, or Thomas Hall's *Plain and Easy Explication* to all Highland scholars who could read. Among the most popular of such

books in Scotland was *The Mother's Catechism for the Young Child* (Edinburgh, 1731), written by the Rev. John Willison of Dundee. This book begins with "A Word to Christian parents," which includes this advice:

Let every child have a copy [of *The Mother's Catechism*], for it serves to explain *The Shorter Catechism* to them. Provide Bibles for them, together with *Confessions of Faith*, Vincent's *Catechism*, Guthrie's *Trial of a saving interest*, and such like little books...But O Mothers! It is for you mainly that this little book is directed. Children are mostly about your hand in their tender years ...Would it not grieve you to hear them crying, or to see them frying in hell-fire without relief? O Labour then to prevent it in time. (pp. 5-6)

After such a grim preamble it is some relief to find that *The Mother's Catechism* is relatively simple in language, and nearer to a child's understanding than *The Shorter Catechism*. But it is by no means easy. Here are a few of the 400 Questions and Answers:

Question. Who made you?  
Answer. God.

Question. Who is it that redeems you?  
Answer. Christ.

Question. Who is it that sanctifies you?  
Answer. The Holy Ghost.

Question. Of what are you made?  
Answer. Of dust.

Question. What doth that teach you?  
Answer. To be humble and mindful of death.

This is followed by "Historical Questions for Children out of the Bible," and "The Ten Commandments in Metre":

- I. Have thou no other God but me.
- II. Unto no image bend thy knee.
- III. Take not the name of God in vain.
- IV. Do not the Sabbath day profane.
- V. Honour thy Father and Mother too.
- VI. And see that thou no murder do.
- VII. From whoredom keep thee chaste and clean.

VIII. And steal not, though thy state be mean.

IX. Of false report bear not the blot.

X. What is thy neighbour's covet not.

The book is completed with morning and evening prayers and graces. This book was published and republished many times, even into the twentieth century, and no fewer than 17 editions were in Gaelic. It had a place in many Scottish homes, and was regularly used in the schools.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748), non-conformist preacher and hymn-writer, was as popular in Scotland as in his native England, and his *The Young Child's First and Second Catechism* was issued many times. *The First Catechism*, "to be begun at three or four years old," starts:

Question. Can you tell me, child, who made you?

Answer. The great God, who made heaven and earth.

Question. What doth God do for you?

Answer. He keeps me from harm by night and by day, and is always doing me good.

A kindly love of children shines in Watts's words, here as in his hymns, but the stern attitude of the early eighteenth century nevertheless appears in such replies as that to the question, "What must become of you if you are wicked?" which is "If I am wicked, I shall be sent down to everlasting fire in hell, among wicked and miserable creatures." Watts's *Second Set of Catechisms for Children from Seven to Twelve Years of Age* is, as one would expect, more advanced, yet still retains an understanding of the child as a developing person:

Question. Dear child, do you know who you are?

Answer. I am a creature of God; for he made me both body and soul.

Question. How do you know that you have a soul?

Answer. Because I find something within me that can think and know--can wish and desire--can rejoice and be sorry--which my body cannot do.

Daily conduct is treated in this matter-of-fact way:

Question. What are those sinful actions which you must avoid?

Answer. Sinful actions are such as these: gluttony, drunkenness and quarrelling, wanton carriage,

and mispending [*sic*] of time, especially the Lord's day, doing dishonour to God, or injury to man.

The help of verse had been used in versions of *The Shorter Catechism*, like that of Robert Smith, schoolmaster at Glamis, who wrote:

The Chief and Highest End of Man  
Is God to glorify.<sup>4</sup>

There is even the very moral *Christian's ABC* (Edinburgh, 1714)<sup>5</sup> which provides an eight-line stanza for each letter of the alphabet, each verse having the refrain:

Then Sinners reform your Lives  
Repentance don't delay,  
For there's none living knows how soon  
May be their dying day.

The verse for letter G is typical:

GIVE always to the Poor  
That are both lame and old,  
The Lord will it again restore  
To thee by double fold.

To us of a later age much of this material must seem grim and serious to be the regular reading of young children, but we must remember, as F.J.H. Darton pointed out, "the authors wrote to the end that children might be saved from hell, with the implication that salvation is extremely difficult."<sup>6</sup> Pleasure to puritan, non-conformist, and presbyterian lay in studying and enjoying the will of God, and they were doing their best for their children when they encouraged them to be serious. This does not mean that the children themselves were any less happy, amusing, mischievous, fun-loving, or ingenious than they are today, though the schoolbooks and the solemn pronouncements of ministers and schoolmasters suggest that school instruction was permeated by fear and a strict adherence to what was considered to be proper Christian conduct.

But there were some less gloomy books, and by a happy chance one turned up in the National Library of Scotland in 1977, a generous gift from the University of Chicago. Its title-page reads:

*A Guide for the Child and Youth. In Two Parts. The First, for Children: Containing Plain and Pleasant Directions to Read English: With Prayers, Graces, and Instructions, Fitted to the Capacity of Children. The Second for Youth: Teaching to Write, Cast Accompts, and Read More Perfectly. With Several Other Varieties, Both Pleasant and Profitable.* Edinburgh, Printed by John Moncur, and sold at his printing-house at the foot of the Bull Cross forgainst the Trone. 1711.

This is the first recorded Scottish edition of a book originally published in England in 1667, and there were later Scottish editions by Chalmers of Aberdeen in 1753 and 1799, in which the title has been changed to *The Child's Guide*, and the author is named as Mr T.H. It begins, of course, with the alphabet, but there follow "Alphabetical sentences" illustrated by woodcuts:

- F. The idle Fool,  
Is whipt at school.
- G. As runs the Glass  
Man's life doth pass
- H. My Book and Heart  
Shall never part
- J. Jesus did die  
For thee and I.
- K. King Charles the good,  
No man of blood
- . . .
- N. Nightingales sing  
In time of spring
- O. The royal Oak  
Our king did save  
From fatal stroke  
Of rebel slave.

The letter X is always a problem in rhyming alphabets: in this book the solution is:

X. Xerxes the great did die  
And so must you and I.<sup>7</sup>

Then follow some well-known proverbs, the Catechism in the Episcopal form, prayers and graces, and passages from the Psalms. There is also "An account of the penmen of the Bible," and a poetical section on behaviour for children. This includes:

In going your way, and passing the Street,  
Take off your hat, and salute those you meet.

A selection from the Book of Proverbs comes next, with the names and order of the books of the Bible.

The second part, or *Youth's Guide*, begins with a conversation between Master and Scholar:

Master. My good child, by this time I hope you can spell  
and read any word of any number of syllables.  
Scholar. Sir, I hardly know what a syllable is.  
M. A syllable is an exact full sound of so many  
letters as may be spelled together, as in the  
word *division*, are four syllables, *di-vi-si-on*.  
S. How many letters are in a syllable?  
M. Any number under nine, as, *I do say, that Welch  
knight brought strength*.  
S. What letters make a syllable?  
M. Any of the vowels, *a, e, i, o, u*, as *a-ny,  
i-dols, o-ver, u-ni-ty*.

*The Youth's Guide*, like the *Child's* includes alphabetical sentences, illustrated by cuts:

Q When the king saw Esther the queen, he held out the  
golden scepter [*sic*] that was in his hand  
R In *Ramah* was a voice heard, Rachel weeping for her  
children  
S *Samuel* took a vial of oil, and poured it upon *Saul's*  
head and kist him.  
. . .  
X The king's heart is in the land of the Lord, as the  
rivers of water, he turneth it whithersoever he will.  
. . .  
Z There was a rich man among the publicans named Zaccheus.  
The same sought to see Jesus, but could not for the  
crowd because he was of low stature; so he ran and  
climbed up in a sycamore tree.

This alphabet does not face up to X at all. The book goes on to "necessary observations for a Christian" which end with a footnote: "N.B. A young man that reads four chapters from the Bible every day, reads over the whole in less than a year." There are sections on writing and arithmetic. Partly because of the illustrations, primitive as they are, partly because the text is well and sensitively written, this book has charm. It may have been used in schools, possibly in private ones, and in the homes of wealthier families.

In an age and culture where knowledge of the Bible and the principles of religion were supremely important for life in this world and happy survival in the next, the use of Bible and *Shorter Catechism* was not only convenient but so desirable as to be held essential. The words and phrases were deeply imprinted on the minds of children, and patterns of words, attitudes, personalities together made a body of knowledge that was typically Scottish. Yet the use of Bible and Catechism brought problems in the teaching of reading. Even the simplest books of the Bible contain difficult words, seventeenth century locutions, awkward foreign names and place-names, as well as exciting stories and memorable words. Think of learning by heart--spelling out in syllables--names like Nebuchadnezzar, Jeroboam, Elijah, Zarephath! Some of these might come under the heading of outlandish words that children learn to recognize and spell quite easily--as they do "elephant" or "television"--but most would find them and their like pretty difficult. A group of children spelling Nebuchadnezzar would have to say, "Enn-ee-bee spells Neb; you-see-aitch spells uch," and so on until all the syllables were combined in a final triumphant "Enn-ee-bee-you-see-aitch-ae-dee-enn-ee-zed-zed-ae-ar--NEBUCHADNEZZAR!" Imagine a class of children chanting this out, the slow ones desperately trying to keep up with their clever classmates! As a teaching medium the Old Testament has decided limitations, but it was the accepted text for generations. But it is hard to accept Mr. Belford's statement<sup>8</sup> that a general test of reading was the 12th Chapter of Nehemiah.

The effect on generations of Scottish children of learning *The Shorter Catechism* or its alternatives, and of memorizing large parts of the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, must have been deep and widespread, but is not easily assessed. Familiarity with the poetic passages of the Bible, and with the characters so vividly described there can be traced in Scottish literature. Burns, Scott, Hogg, Galt, Cockburn and Stevenson all assume a familiarity with the Bible, and their works abound with biblical references and recollections. Perhaps something of the logical arrangement of *The Shorter Cate-*

*chism* has remained in Scottish character and attitudes--a fondness for reasoned argument, even for emphatic and authoritarian assertion. We opt less willingly for compromise than our neighbours in England do. Yet in England, as in Scotland, the Bible and the various Catechisms were in regular use as texts in reading. The control of the ministers and elders in the Presbyterian churches of Scotland was probably stricter than elsewhere, with regular visitations in the homes and schools. In spite of that, however, there were complaints in the General Assembly of the Kirk that "the ancient and laudable practice of instructing youth in the principles of religion by means of the Catechisms has been much neglected."<sup>9</sup> Such views were often put forward by the evangelical factions of the Kirk, by groups who felt that there had been a falling away from the old high standards. It is true, however, to say that the Bible and *The Shorter Catechism*, while not everywhere used for the early teaching of reading as the nineteenth century progressed, yet remained firmly in the school curriculum.

The feelings of a boy are understood with affectionate recall by Neil Gunn in this passage from *The Atom of Delight*:

The boy's earliest encounter with systematic thought took place in the pages of a thin booklet called *The Shorter Catechism*, consisting of Question and Answer and proceeding from the simple to the complex, with "reasons annexed," in a way that manifestly had exercised profound minds. At an astonishingly early age, children could rattle off most of the Answers, word perfect, with a delivery not unlike that devoted to the boy on the burning deck or to Tennyson's brook. In truth, question-and-answer because it partakes of the nature of a game could at times become quite exciting. Question: *What is repentance unto life?*

Sometimes a boy (or girl) was completely stuck because he could not remember the opening words. This sort of frustration was painful. Sometimes he got half-way and foundered. Sometimes in the thick of it words might get transposed or even left out, and, though knowing he was thus dismasted, a boy would still valiantly struggle on, making for harbour with all he knew. But one boy (so often it was a girl) would be waiting with impatient anxiety for his turn and when it came the broadside was released with a weight and speed that emulated a Highland burn in spate rather than any gentle brook. Answer: *Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred*

of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavour after, new obedience.

The boy's introduction to the Catechism began at the beginning with the first Question: *What is the chief end of man?* and the Answer: *Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.* This introduction must have taken place at an early age, for the two words "chief end" sounded in his mind as one word "cheefend" for quite a long time. Indeed he might still have to make a deliberate effort to break the old hypnotic clinch, to separate the words into "meaning"; so strangely attractive a sound is "cheefend," the accent landed on the second syllable, "fend." Yet because of all the words some overtone of meaning was doubtless conveyed, or if not of meaning at least of the atmosphere in which it tried to breathe. One got acclimatized in some measure to a country where great divines could putt the shot towards some very mysterious pegs. It was there, if only to be avoided like lessons generally, though that is hardly exact enough, for the other world could *touch* in a way no school lesson could.

Being a normal savage the boy was able, with temporary defeats here and there, to look after himself, and the Shorter Catechism, far from doing him any harm, as tender humanists equipped with a knowledge of child psychology may nowadays fear, it probably did him a lot of good. There was something tough about it and thorough.<sup>10</sup>

The Education (Scotland) Act of 1872, which set the pattern for the administration of Scottish schools for the rest of the century, deprived ministers and presbyteries of the power they had hitherto held, but stated in a general way that the custom of providing religious instruction should be continued much as it had been, subject to the right of parents to withdraw a child, on grounds of conscience, from such teaching or observance. The influence and presence of ministers of the Church of Scotland and the Free Church and United Presbyterian Church were strong and important in the new, elected, School Boards, and they saw to it that there was little if any change in the religious training. Knowledge of the Bible and generally also of *The Shorter Catechism* remained characteristic parts of the normal school course, but less and less were they used, as they had been for so long, as part of the reading lesson.

## SPELLING BOOKS

The teaching of reading English to little children has always presented problems because of the spelling and pronunciation of the language. The position was graphically described by Maria Edgeworth and her father Richard Lovell in their *Practical Education* (London, 1797):

As it is usually managed, it is a dreadful task indeed to learn, and if possible a more dreadful task to teach to read: with the help of counters, and coaxing, and gingerbread, or by dint of reiterated pain and terror, the names of the four and twenty letters [*sic*] of the alphabet are, perhaps, in the course of some weeks, firmly fixed in the pupils's memory. So much the worse; all these names will disturb him if he have common sense, and at every step must stop his progress.--Must *e* in *pen*, and *e* in *where*, and *e* in *her*, and *e* in *fear*, all be called *e* alike?--*O* in the exclamation *Oh!* is happily called by its alphabetical name, but in *to* we can hardly know it again, and in *morning* and *wonder* it has a third and a fourth additional sound.--Must a child know all this by intuition, or must it be whipt into him? But he must know a great deal more before he can read the most common words.--In teaching a child to read, every letter should have a precise single sound attached to its figure: this should never vary.<sup>11</sup>

The same story is told by George Fulton of Edinburgh in his *Pronouncing Spelling Book* of about 1800:<sup>12</sup>

According to the common mode of instruction, how it must perplex a child to be told that *See aye jee* sounds *Cag*? His ear tells him, that *See aye jee* sounds *Sage*. But how much more must he be perplexed, when, on meeting in a Spelling-book with the three combinations *na, ti, on* (which he had been previously taught to pronounce *nay tie on*), he is told, that they must when united be pronounced--*na'shun!*

The attitude of the Edgeworths and Fulton shows a concern for children that does not appear in the textbooks of the early part of the eighteenth century, when the recognition of letters and pronunciations of words were taught by constant repetition and the learning by heart of lists of words. A manuscript in the National Library, of about 1720, describes how to divide the words of *The Shorter Catechism* into syllable-

bles for easier learning, and adds that the general practice of the day was to "learn to read by the ear and memory only,"<sup>13</sup> and that syllabication was a more efficient way. Most of the Spelling-books of that time, and for most of the eighteenth century consist of lists of words of one, two, three, and up to seven syllables, which pupils were expected to memorize. At the same time, concern with the differences between how words are spelt and how they are pronounced increased with the publication of the dictionaries of Bailey, Johnson, Entick, Kenrick, Perry, Scott, Sheridan, and Walker. There were arguments, largely academic, about how to indicate stress, the pronunciation or "power" of vowels, and the division of words into syllables. At the extreme ends of these discussions are protagonists like the teachers of elocution, particularly popular in Edinburgh, where there was some sensitivity about the pronunciation of English--as the diaries of Boswell show--and the awe-inspiring figure of James Elphinstone, whose aim was to reform English spelling on what he felt was a reasonable basis.<sup>14</sup> Most of the Spelling-books from about the middle of the eighteenth century attempt to indicate pronunciation, and some of the systems are complicated. Rarely were the lists of words for little children accompanied by short sentences or stories, and one must assume that reading practice came from the Bible and Catechism. It is not until the nineteenth century that it becomes common to combine letter--and word--recognition with simple stories, often with illustrations. The credit for the change to this more humane approach must to some extent be given to distinguished writers such as Ann and Jane Taylor and Maria Edgeworth. From spelling-books and the Bible, it became the practice to go on to a *Collection*, a reading-book of selections usually from well-known authors.

In the long period from the early eighteenth century to 1872, many spelling-books and reading-books were published, and it would be impossible to discuss, or even mention, all of them. Particularly from the 1820's, when the numbers of children attending school rose rapidly, and well-known Scottish publishers developed and expanded the trade, the numbers are very great. All that can be done is to select a few of the most popular books, and to attempt, by a study of them, to show something of the general trend.

In the early years of the eighteenth century a number of spelling-books written in England were advertised in the Scottish papers: some of them, like the work of the well-known Isaac Watts, became popular, and were used in the SSPCK schools. One of the earliest Scottish books is that by James Dun, Schoolmaster at Langholm, whose *The Best Method of Teach-*

*ing to Read and to Spell English* (Edinburgh) was first advertised in 1729. The advertisement claimed that "the several tables, and the syllables and words there, are so nicely digested...that they may be learned with more ease and expedition than those of any other book on the head yet extant.... This method is approved by the best judges and teachers, who have seen and considered it, some in England, many in Scotland, and particularly in Edinburgh." There is a copy of the 4th edition (1766) in Glasgow University, in which it is claimed that hundreds of copies were sent to the SSPCK schools in the Highlands and Islands. The books consist of lists of words to be learned, from simple one-syllables to really difficult multi-syllabled words, including some of the more abstruse and alarming proper names from the Old Testament. There is also a list of correct pronunciations, of which the following are perhaps of Scottish significance:

Bishop--pronounced Bushop  
 First--pronounced Furst  
 Fire--pronounced Fiur  
 Folly--pronounced Fally  
 Handkerchief--pronounced Henkercher.<sup>15</sup>

John Warden's *Spelling-Book* (Edinburgh), "wherein the pronunciation and spelling of the English tongue are reduced to a very few principles," appeared in 1753. Facing the problem of indicating pronunciation, Warden compiled lists of words containing the vowels and diphthongs arranged according to their sounds. He noted, for example, that the vowel *a* was pronounced in three different ways, which he illustrated and indicated by little numbers (1, 2, and 3) above the vowel where it appeared. The many exceptions were listed also, to be learned by heart like the others. All of this led Warden to set forth some extraordinary words for children to learn to spell. It is comparatively simple to make a list of words in which, as he puts it, "e is of no use"--captive, matrice, surplice, umpire; or a list in which "e sounds s"--advance, secede, deceit, incense; but when he goes further, to "two vowels commonly a diphthong," he includes words like Briareus, delineate, chalybeate, Gamaliel, theoretical, ubiety, venereal, and polytheism. A collection of five-syllabled words contains the following: coordinately, heroicalness, reanimated, and gratuitousness; and a general list of words for revision has: anacreontic, asthma, cicatrize, and hermaphrodite. There are collections of words similar in pronunciation but different in spelling, such as Barbara, a woman; Barbary, a country; Barberry, a fruit; augur, a soothsayer; and auger, "for carpen-

ters." Among the many surprising words that Warden has found, perhaps the most outré are: atcham, haurient, arbitratix, bexly, fitchew, piacular, cachexy, usk, and amlock. No doubt Lady Betty Carnagie, who had her name written in the copy of this book--now in the National Library--worked her way through these lists, without the relief of short stories or even moral sentences. Warden sternly says: "I decline putting any connecting discourses, by way of lessons, into this book." Of the common practice of using the Bible as a reading text, he writes: "The custom of teaching children to read by the Holy Bible, or other religious books, is very unaccountable. The reason alleged in defence of this custom, is, that thereby the principles of religion are more strongly impressed on their minds..." but, he adds, "till they can read currently they cannot understand." He mentions the use of collections at the proper stage, and recommends his father's *Collection* of 1737 as the best available.

Arthur Masson's *Spelling Book* is in many ways similar to Warden's. Like the good Aberdonian he was, Masson disdains any special knacks or hidden mysteries in the business of teaching children the elements of reading, and knows, he says, "no better recipe for teaching a child to read than that of indefatigable industry and diligence." Nevertheless, it is a sort of play-way that he recommends for "a thorough knowledge of the letters." He has used with success four small cubes, one of them with the six vowels (i.e. including *y*) pasted on its sides, and the other three with the consonants. He then "made the child throw up the cube of the vowels till he should cast up an *a*, *i*, or *o* &c, and so with the consonants. When he hits on the letter proposed, he draws the stake, which may be whatever the teacher shall judge proper." Masson says the method can be adapted for syllables and even for words, but admits "...it may be practised, however, with greater success in private families than in a public school."<sup>16</sup> Masson, a popular Edinburgh schoolmaster, was no narrow-minded pedant; he was the friend of the young poet, Robert Fergusson, and when he visited Paris, carried letters of introduction to Diderot from David Hume. His method of teaching reading was based on the learning by heart of lists of words, graded according to the number of syllables. He was open-minded about orthography, and favoured *honor* and *favor* to *honour* and *favour*.

It is possible to get just a glimpse of how Masson's school was taught from his description of his approach to multi-syllabled words.

In teaching these [he says] the master will find it a great ease to himself, and advantage to his scholars, to

form into a class all those in his school who are advanced so far...[He suggests a group of a dozen]...Suppose the word to be read to be *Abdicate*; the first scholar should pronounce aloud the syllable *Ab*, the second the syllable *di*, the third should join both *ab-di*, the fourth should pronounce the syllable *cate*, and the fifth read the word entire *Ab-di-cate*...<sup>17</sup>

He declares that the great French writer on this subject, Charles Rollin, had observed this method successfully used in a school in Orleans. As it happens, the word *ab-di-cate*, split up in Masson's way, illustrates one of the academic points on which teachers of reading differed. Masson states it as a rule that "...one single consonant between two vowels goes to the last vowel, in dividing syllables..." (p. 49) and provides as examples *a-pish*, *ba-con*, *bai-liff*, *au-gust*, *na-ked*, etc. Other writers, Perry and Telfaire, for example, said this offended the ear and eye, and wrote rather, *ap-ish*, *ba-con*, etc.

William Perry and Cortes Telfaire were Englishmen who taught private schools in Edinburgh in the 1770's; both made rather a point in their books that they, as Englishmen, knew more about the pronunciation of the language than native Scots teachers did. Perry published *The Only Sure Guide to the English Tongue* in Edinburgh in 1776, a spelling-book popular in Scotland and England, and a tremendous success in America. (There were 22 editions from Worcester, Massachusetts, by 1817, but Perry made no money from them, since there was no international agreement on copyright.) In Telfaire's *Town and Country Spelling-Book* (Edinburgh, 1775) he described himself as "Curer of Impediments in Speech." He claimed to present the pronunciation of the best speakers in London, "designed more particularly for the use of schools at a distance from London." The advertisement for his school said that "no Scotch" may be spoken in school. Both books include long lists of words, graded according to syllables, to be learned by heart: Perry's collection has no fewer than 932 two-syllabled words to be spelled. It is, however, an advance on Arthur Masson that each of these books contains short reading passages, roughly graded according to difficulty. They are all very moral. Perry's first exercise reads: "My son in the way of bad men do not go." Hopes rise at the title of Telfaire's section on "Moral and entertaining lessons," only to be dashed by the discovery that it consists of a short history of the Bible, in 26 pages; a number of fables, with morals; a section on behaviour at meals; eight essays from Addison's *Spectator*; and Parnell's long poem in heroic verse, *The Hermit*.

Perry's book has fables, too, but in this case translated from the French by Master John Marjoribanks, aged fifteen, after only five weeks tuition in French by Mr. Perry. Both writers are concerned about the naming of the letters *H* and *Z*, and both suggest "aitch" and "hee" for *H*, and "zed" and "zee" for *Z*. Telfaire's book has a special significance as the first schoolbook printed in Scotland to have the alphabet illustrated by wood-cuts. *A* is illustrated by an apple--the short sound--and by Angel; *X*, a problem for all illustrators of the alphabet, is rather far-fetchedly depicted by an Ax [*sic*]. Telfaire's little book has many fascinating details, among them the following pronunciations:

bury--pronounced berry  
 burgh--pronounced barroe  
 bayonet--pronounced bagonet  
 coroner--pronounced crowner  
 cucumber--pronounced cowcumber  
 chew--pronounced chaw  
 asparagus--pronounced sparrowgrass  
 accompt--pronounced account  
 boatswain--pronounced bosan  
 indict--pronounced indite.

A further development was the *Spelling and pronouncing dictionary* brought out by Alexander Barrie, an Edinburgh teacher, in 1794. Its title-page reads: "Gradually arranged, from words of one letter to those of eight or nine syllables; having the words divided and accented, and the parts of speech distinguished." Barrie recommended that scholars should work their way systematically through this dictionary, "according to their capacity, as an exercise for them at home, to be spelt every morning, till they have gone over the whole." One hates to imagine the spelling sessions in the homes of parents and pupils faced with the last of Barrie's eight-syllabled words--anthropomorphitanianismicaliation.

The early nineteenth century, as we have seen, saw an increase in the population, in the number of schools, and also in concern with the methods of teaching. This was particularly true of the teaching of reading, and the authors of spelling-books, reflecting the mood of the time, saw their books reprinted many times. Barrie's *Tyro's Guide*, a spelling-book of 1800, with 5,000 words for spelling, was reprinted four times by 1807. Barrie, George Fulton, Andrew Knight and William Lennie may well have been the first Scottish teachers really to make money from their textbooks.

George Fulton (1752-1831) is probably the best known of

these authors. Born in the west of Scotland, he was trained as a printer and as a lad was on the staff of the *Dumfries Weekly Magazine*. (One of his colleagues on that staff was John Mayne, poet of *The Siller Gun*, and both men met Robert Fergusson on his visit to Dumfries.) Fulton moved to Edinburgh, where he became successively master of a Charity school, one of the Town's English schools, and finally of a private school in the New Town of Edinburgh. Of Fulton, Chambers' *Eminent Scotsmen* has this to say:

In teaching grammar and elocution and in conveying to his pupils correct notions of the analogies of our language, Mr Fulton was quite unrivalled in his day. Many teachers from other quarters became his pupils, and were successful in propagating his system; and he had the honour to teach many of the most distinguished speakers of the day, both in the pulpit and the bar... the result of his studies was embodied in a pronouncing dictionary, which was introduced into almost all the schools of the kingdom... Having realized a considerable fortune... [he retired to live]... *otium cum dignitate* at a pleasant villa called Summerfield (near Newhaven)....

His training as a printer was not wasted, for he devised a box of blocks with letters on them for the teaching of letter recognition, which, he said, "...have proved to be a most useful apparatus, both in teaching children the knowledge of the letters, and how to combine them so as to form syllables and words."<sup>18</sup>

Fulton's first book was *Extracts from sacred Scripture*, published in the 1790's--no copy exists--was later re-published as part of *A pronouncing spelling-book* (Edinburgh, 1800). He followed these, after 1811, with *The Orthoepy*, which expands the idea he maintained that the basis of instruction at the early stages of reading must be concerned with pronunciation. Adopting notions from Thomas Sheridan, whose lectures on elocution had caused widespread interest in speech-conscious Edinburgh, Fulton suggested these names for the letters of the alphabet: *a--a; b--eb; c--ek; d--ed...h--ha...z--ez*. The new names were intended to remove any confusion that might exist in the child's mind between the names of the letters and their sounds.

Here is how this well-known and successful teacher taught the very first principles of reading. In "A simple primer," which is part of his *Orthoepy*, he arranges the letters as follows:

a b c d  
 e f g h  
 i j k l m n  
 o p q r s t  
 u v w x y z

To engage the attention of very young people, we desire them to consider the letters as a Regiment, divided into five companies, each company commanded by its respective officer. The officers (or vowels) we distinguish by the names a e i o u...To the common soldiers (or consonants) we give the names assigned them by Mr Sheridan; annexing to each some word with which the pupil is well acquainted: thus:

eb--Bird  
 ec--Cat  
 ed--Dog  
 ef--Fish  
 eg--Gun  
 ha--Harp &c.

The pupil is then asked to call up *a*'s company, that is *b*, *c*, and *d* and to name them eb--Bird, ec--Cat, and ed--Dog. Then the letters are mixed around, as *b d a c*, and again he has to name them. Then he does the same with *e*, *i*, *o*, and *u*. (pp. 22-4)

At a later stage the pupil has to learn the sounds of vowels and consonants, and Fulton makes them learn the following three lines, which contain all the common sounds of the vowels:

Māke thēse tīmes mōre pūre.  
 Band men still cross us.  
 Mārk āll hēr shōrt rūles.

In these lines, for example, the four different sounds of *a* are given in the words *māke*, *bad*, *mārk*, and *āll*, and similarly with the other vowels. Fulton's *Orthoepy* was intended both for teachers and pupils, and contains quite an elaborate analysis of English sounds, consonants as well as vowels, and a series of exercises, such as the following:

fēr god. onūr the king.  
 luv and ô-bā'ūr pā-rēnts and tēchérz,  
 bê kyīnd tú ūr bruthērz and sīstērz.

dū not quarrel with ūr plāfel-lōz.

The system looks difficult, and explanation of it almost inevitably makes it appear complicated, but a capable teacher could use such a method with ease, and it certainly appears, from the number of references to it, and the books that imitated it, that Fulton's scheme was popular in Scotland. It is a fair assumption that his emphasis on pronunciation would be very acceptable in the aristocratic and legal homes from which many of his private pupils came.

William Lennie was also master of a private school in Edinburgh. Like Fulton, Lennie in his *The Child's Ladder; or, Gradual Rise from the Alphabet to the Bible* (5th edn., Edinburgh, 1814) insisted that training in pronunciation was the only effective base for learning to read. He claimed in Part I of his series that "care has been taken not only to begin with language so similar to the childish prattle of his playfellows in the nursery that he is highly amused and delighted" (p. 108), and in Part II there are reading sentences intended, in a somewhat contrived manner, to appeal to children's interests. Some of these are:

He is a sad whig.

My horse has left a vast of orts.

Let us try to cure Bob of a cold. Give him a puke for it.

Janet is not a prude.

In the later parts of the series, some of the exercises seem odd to the casual reader, as when Lennie includes imaginary words to show the effect of final *e*: for example, ven, vene; tel, tele; gleb, glebe; ir, ire. He claimed that his system was orderly, the child thoroughly learning one group of words before proceeding to the next. He even goes so far as to say that

by dividing the elements of pronunciation into a certain number of classes, say 70, the child, by getting one of these a day, or one even in two days, will at the end of 70 or at the most 140 days, not only have read as much as he would have done by any other book; but in addition to his reading lessons, (and this is what forms the peculiarity of this system,) the rules for pronouncing each class will, by means of numerous exercises, be so effectually impressed on the memory that he will, with very little assistance, be able to read, though but slowly at first, any ordinary book that may be put into his hands.

(p. 2)

This may sound a little optimistic, but Lennie undoubtedly did his best to cover words found in the Bible, and in his list of proper names from Scripture collected real jaw-breakers, like Zerubbabel, Bethpage, Mytelene, and Capernaum. Like other authors he listed words with odd pronunciations like:

chamois--pronounced shamoy  
 hiccough--pronounced hikkup  
 fivepence--pronounced fippens  
 colonel--pronounced kurnel  
 accompt--pronounced account  
 housewife--pronounced huzzif  
 roquelaure--pronounced rok-e-lo  
 usquebaugh--pronounced uskweba.

*The Improved Primer*, by A. Abbot, which Oliver & Boyd published in the 1830's marks the beginning of a slow change in the nature of children's first reading books. It contains an illustrated alphabet, with A,a Angler; B,b Bullfinch; and so on to X,x Xantippe; Y,y Yew-tree; and (inevitably) Z,z Zebra. Yet the book begins with the traditional "ab, eb, ib, ob, ub," with a note that "The child should be taught to read this and some of the following lessons across the page, and afterwards from the top downwards, till he becomes familiar with them" (p. 12), and there are lists of letters "promiscuously disposed" to be identified. All this is traditional in approach, and the only new element would appear to consist of short stories for children, though even here the words are not simple, and to each story there is an "Application." There are block illustrations. "The Dog in the Manger" is as follows:

A surly dog was lying upon a manger full of hay; a hungry ox, who was passing that way, came in and was taking a mouthful of hay, when the envious ill-natured dog, getting up and snarling at him, would not suffer him to touch it. The disappointed ox, giving him a look of scorn, addressed him thus: "A plague light on you, malicious wretch, who will neither eat hay yourself, nor suffer others to do so."

#### The Application

Envy is the most unnatural and unaccountable of all the passions. Never envy in another the possession of that which would be useless to yourself. (p. 48)

John Wood, of the Edinburgh Sessional School, was already in the 1820's introducing a more interesting and more humane method in the early stages. In his book *An Account of the*

*Edinburgh Sessional School* (Edinburgh, 1828) he quotes from two earlier textbooks he wrote for the school, but this is all we know of them. Schoolbooks are, of all books, the most expendable. In his *Account* the beginners were taught the alphabet from letters pasted on pieces of wood, "and exhibited on a box...so as to be easily shifted, and formed into various arrangements."<sup>19</sup> This reminds us of the blocks used years before by Arthur Masson. Wood goes on with satirical reference to Fulton, Lennie, and their followers:

It seems quite unnecessary to perplex a child at this period of his education, with the classification of consonants, such as their division into *mutes*, *semi-vowels*, *double consonants*, and *liquids*; nor even with the more familiar division of the letters into *vowels* and *consonants*; for it is no easy matter, and certainly not worth the trouble, to make him then comprehend the object of such divisions. Neither does it seem at all advisable to annoy him with any abortive attempt to make him at this period understand the different shades of sound of the vowels (particularly under their technical names of *long* sounds, *short* sounds, and *name* sounds) which can only be learned aright by practice and experience, after he has been taught to combine the letters. It is sufficient for the present to teach him their *forms* and *names*. Some, we are aware, who disapprove of troubling the children at this period with any other classification of letters, attach great importance to their attention being early called to the division into *labials*, *gutturals*, *dentals*, and *nasals*; which, they conceive, should be taught at the very commencement, along with the form of the letters, under the more familiar names of *lip* sounds, *teeth* sounds, *throat* sounds, and *nose* sounds or the like. They are of the opinion that the alphabet cannot be rightly taught unless the letters be arranged according to some such classification, and the pupil be instructed to point out the particular organ, by which the sound is emitted....It must be very seldom indeed that a child at school can require such aid to enable him to speak; or that he will not learn this more effectually by imitating the sound, than by any very narrow inspection of the organ. (pp. 182-3)

After the alphabet the child, under Wood's scheme, goes on to words of two letters--words, not as in the other systems of the time, syllables. He writes:

In most other schools, it is the practice to make the pupils rhyme over every possible combination of two letters into *syllables*, whether forming words or not: e.g. *ba, be, bi, bo, bu, by; ca, ce, ci, co, cu, cy...* and so forth through all the combinations of a vowel with a consonant prefixed; and afterwards, in like manner, *ab, eb, ib, ob, ub...* &c through all the combinations of a vowel with a consonant subjoined. Such also was the practice in the Sessional School till within these very few years. With the exception of the alphabet, no part of the children's education was found so dull, so tedious, and irksome as this...it both gave the child a natural disgust with his education, and also inured him to early habits of rhyming a quantity of sounds, without ever directing his attention, in the slightest degree to their sense or object...[Wood explains that his aim was to change all this.]...To carry the experiment into effect, an elementary book was prepared and printed, but only a very small impression was thrown off, for the use of the school. This book contained no unmeaning sounds, but *words* only which were familiar to the children, and which they were called upon to explain. No sooner was it introduced, than its good effects in inspiring animation and activity, where all had hitherto been cold and spiritless, were immediately apparent. (pp. 183-5)

No copy of Wood's primer has been found to date, but luckily for us, Wood described it in some detail in his *Account of the Edinburgh Sessional School*. After the children had learned the alphabet, by the method already mentioned, the first lesson was the following table of short words:

|                            |           |    |           |    |           |    |           |
|----------------------------|-----------|----|-----------|----|-----------|----|-----------|
| Be                         | <i>He</i> | me | <i>we</i> | Ye | <i>By</i> | fy | <i>my</i> |
| We                         | <i>Fy</i> | he | <i>ye</i> | My | <i>Me</i> | by | <i>be</i> |
| By                         | <i>Ye</i> | my | <i>fy</i> | He | <i>Be</i> | we | <i>me</i> |
| Me                         | <i>My</i> | be | <i>by</i> | fy | <i>We</i> | ye | <i>he</i> |
| O ye. Fy, fy. Be ye by me. |           |    |           |    |           |    |           |

Eight words are here repeated, in *Italic* and *Roman*, and in various arrangements. The second lesson deals with *Go, Ho, Lo, No, So, Wo*, and ends with the line "Fy no. Go ye. So we go. Lo! I go by." The third, fourth, and fifth lessons proceed further with two-letter words, and end with the sentences: "Oh fy to do so. Do ye as I do. Wo to me if I do so. Ah! is it so? Ha! it is he. Am I to do it, or he?" The first five lessons aimed to cover all the two-lettered words in the language. It was a principle of Wood's system that each word had

to be read, spelt, and explained by the pupil. "In reading each table at first, they are allowed to say be,e,be; h,e,he, and so on..." (p. 190). Naming the letters was natural to children who had just learned the alphabet. "In spelling these short words, the monitor or master pronounces the word, and the pupils names the letters..." (P. 190). Pupils were asked to explain what each word meant, and a good deal of laxity was allowed in the answers. Deploring any attempt to make the explanations always technically accurate, Wood says: "... in speaking of the word *ox* for example, would our object be as well attained, by teaching the child to repeat any translation of the definition somewhere referred to by Dr Johnson in order to explain the inadequacy of all definitions, 'Animal, quadrupes, ruminans, cornutum,' as when we hear him tell us, in his own familiar language, that *ox* means 'a muckle coo.'" Further on, Wood explains how far he would go in accepting explanations. For *sty*, he would accept "a sow's house" or "a red and sore thing about the eye"; for *fry*, "to fry herrings"; for *shy*, "afraid to speak" (pp. 191-3).

From two letters to three letters the tables proceed until "...after the child has become master of the lessons of three letters, he is no longer allowed to linger on the threshold... but he is now, by the perusal of interesting and instructive passages initiated into the real benefit, as well as the practice of reading..." (p. 201). Passages of continuous reading then follow, all of them religious in character, the subjects God, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah.

The first passage, on God, begins as follows: "God bids the sun to rise, and he bids it set. He doth give the rain and the dew to wet the soil; and at his will it is made dry. The heat and the cold come from him..." (p. 202). On this passage the children would be asked questions like: Who bids the sun to rise? What is meant by the sun rising? Where it rises? When it rises? What its rising occasions? Who bids it set? What is meant by setting? Wood declares that by the explanatory method his pupils gained a detailed knowledge of Bible stories, especially creditable since none of the children had books at home.

Wood's *Second Primer*<sup>20</sup> continued on similar lines, the reading lessons based largely on Scripture history, but adding extracts of useful instruction about animals, trees, seeds, minerals, manufactures, and on savage manners "to impress them with a due sense of the blessings of education" (p. 209). The emphasis was always on increasing vocabulary, instilling correct spelling, and stimulating interest and understanding through question and answer. There is always more sympathetic understanding of the needs and abilities of children in Wood's

books than appears in those of his Scottish predecessors, though here one must be careful, for very often doctrines and theories that appear harsh to us may in practice have been gently administered.

After about 1840, a change begins gradually to take effect on the teaching of reading to little children, the slow and almost imperceptible rise in the popularity of the phonic system. To some extent it was a development of ideas like those of Fulton, where the importance of pronunciation was emphasized as opposed to spelling. To some extent also the new ideas owed a debt to John Wood's "Explanatory" system, with its insistence on children at even the earliest stages using words rather than random associations of letters and knowing their meanings. A powerful impetus also came from Kay-Shuttleworth's visits to schools on the continent, where he found phonic as distinct from alphabetic methods in use. His report to the Poor Law Commissioners of 1838 puts his views clearly: "The children in the infant schools would learn the *powers of letters* in small words, and afterwards their names...."<sup>21</sup>

There was no sudden change in the schools or their books. There never is in education. Teachers accustomed to methods which they feel have been successful, are loath to throw the old ways overboard in favour of new, less well-tried ones. But very gradually in the earliest stages learning the sounds began to take over from learning the alphabet, learning simple words likely to be familiar to the child superseded memorizing lists of words of one syllable, then two and so on, and understanding the meanings of words became more important than merely recognizing and saying them. As one would expect, of course, some books continued the old eighteenth century methods, others tried the new ones, and many maintained a sort of discreet mixture.

Chambers's *First* and *Second Books of Reading*, of 1845, very happily show the change that was taking place. The preface to the *First book* talks of two aspects of teaching reading, the mechanical and the mental. The mechanical aspect is concerned with the forms of letters and their sounds. The forms can best be taught on the blackboard,<sup>22</sup> but the sounds are "...best taught by showing their *powers* in words, as their names in some instances do not correspond to these powers... Let the vowels be sounded boldly, and the consonants with a considerable emission of breath..." (Preface, p. [ii]). Mental training, on the other hand, "implies constant illustration by object, experiment, drawing, pantomime, anecdote...to make the child really understand the idea represented by the word employed" (p. [ii]).

Following this scheme, the author, after listing the alphabet, vowels, and consonants, proceeds to simple words like, O. so. no. or. on. ox. do. to., and so on, employing all the vowels. Then, and this is where the mental training begins, he gives a number of "Names of things and places"--face, lace, cake, lake...and so on. From these he passes to "Names of qualities"--lame, tame, late, safe, etc., with practice lessons on them, such as: "Soft cane. Old man. Big red lips. Pure red wine." Finally come "Names of actions"--take, make, wake, bake, etc., with practice sentences like "Taste my cake. The hat falls. Can cats bark?"

The success of this clear and logical little book of 16 pages depends on the teacher. It is left to the teacher to pronounce words like "bake" and "cake" for the children to imitate without the apparatus of complicated phonic symbols like Fulton's or long lists of words with "silent e." The book uses words, and not meaningless groups of letters, and the grouping of words as "Names of things and places," "Names of qualities" and "Names of actions" begins a mental training that can end with the recognition of nouns, adjectives and verbs. There is much to be said in favour of this plain, un-illustrated little book, and the author could fairly claim that "every sentence is intelligible to a child of six years old" (p. [ii]).

The *Second book of reading* carries further the same general plan. On the "mechanical" side, the pupil "is here advanced to a regular series of lessons on the consonants, single and compound, and...double vowels and digraphs..." but "there are many abstract, and also many coarse terms which...have been avoided" (p. [ii]). The "mental" training is similar to John Wood's "explanatory" method. Sketches on the blackboard, and the use of "sensible objects" are commended:

1. *Names of things* will perhaps be best explained by showing the object itself, or its picture, and by asking the children to tell what they know about the object. Their own simple definitions are very often the best.
2. *Names of qualities*, by requesting children to name objects that have the quality. For example, to explain *deep*--'Tell me any thing that is deep'. The following have been named--'The sea, a well, a coal-pit, a canal'.
3. *Names of actions*, by performing the action named, or describing it by some interesting anecdote.

(p. [ii])

The book ends with a series of short lessons on subjects like

"The works of God," "Animals," "A toy shop," "A story of two dogs." The treatment of animals in these simple stories is sympathetic but not sentimental. For example, an illustration showing cats playing includes one with a dead bird and another with "a poor mouse, which she is going to play with and then eat...Cats are gentle, but sly; their feet are soft, but their claws are sharp" (p. 36).

These two books form the introduction to *Chambers's educational course*: the readers which follow them will be mentioned later.

A few more examples will suffice to show what the early primers were like. In the National Library are two primers published in Glasgow probably in the 1850's. *A new first book*, of only 12 pages, contains only lower-case letters. There are, in heavy black type, lists of words like "big. fig. wig...cart. tart. part," and simple sentences such as "is my tart in the cart" or "ned has a fig and a big wig." Some of the sentences are even more far-fetched: "do not pull at the bull. the bull is full: is he not?" *A new second book on an easy plan* includes in its 36 pages details like capitals, numerals, and a clock face with Roman figures. Lesson 64, at the end of the book contains much good advice as well as a warning:

It is ten so we must go to school to learn, for when we are big we will have to work. We must learn to read books, and to write and count on slates. We must do all the master bids us or we will be bad. If we do not learn well we will not get up dux. If Dan will not learn well he will be a dunce.

It is easy to smile at the use of simple words in these phonic readers. In Constable's *English reading book* (Edinburgh, 1860) a comic tongue-twister is:

Bob's papa has a big wig, it is far too big for Bob, but when Bob's papa was from home in the gig, Bob had on his hat and his big wig. Bob is a sad wag. Fy, Bob, do not set the big wig on my dog Shag; it will fall off, for you can-not fix a big wig on a dog. A wig is for a man, and not at all for a dog or pig...Can a pig dig? Yes, a pig can dig, for I see two big pigs dig at the root of that tree. Bob has got six figs, and the mad wag says he is to give them to the pig." (pp. 9-10)

It is perhaps too rash to claim for Constable's little book the first mention of "The cat sat on the mat," for that animal was a natural for the phonic system.

D.G. Guthrie's *First lessons in reading, after the phonic method*, published in Kirkcaldy in 1862 is strictly a phonic primer: "The names of the letters," he says, "are intended to be learned at *the end* of the first book, before the pupil begins to spell and write, and the alphabet is accordingly placed on the third page of the cover" (i.e. the inside back cover). The simple lessons include, predictably, "pat my fat cat, it ran at the rat. The cat sat on the mat, the rat ran by," and, as conclusion to the book:

Sam has got a hot bun, he is dux.  
is the dux to get a bun, yes, he is so.  
Sam has cut the bun, it is not bad.  
go to bed at ten, get up at six.  
get to be dux then get a hot bun.

Guthrie's book is full of hints for young teachers. "Each lesson," he writes, "should be mastered, and each page revised, before leaving it. Let your manner be as lively and kind as possible" (p. [iii]).

While many books, and probably the most attractive, were on phonic lines, there were still books published on methods reminiscent of eighteenth century products. James Douglas's *Progressive English reader*, from A. & C. Black in 1863 or so, begins as Fulton's books began, with a "Key to the Sounds of the Vowels," and lists of words are given to be memorized. For example there is a list of "Words with double initial consonants promiscuously arranged--then, blade, scope, black, snake, shire &c." (p. 6). There are illustrations, but not always related to the subject or story alongside: it would appear that it was felt right to have cuts in children's books at that time. The book ends with the old fable of the fox and the grapes, with the moral "To de-fame the ob-ject of our desire, be-cause it is be-yond our reach, is mean and self-ish" (p. 54).

By 1872, books for little children had large print, illustrations--though not commonly in colour--simple verses and stories. They were, on the whole, more interesting to children because more carefully suited to their stage of development. A similar change took place in the reading-books of older children.

*(To be continued)*

*Edinburgh*

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>S.W. Carruthers, *Three Centuries of the Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Frederickton, N.B., 1957), p. 110.

<sup>2</sup>(Edinburgh, 1706). Copy in Aberdeen University Library.

<sup>3</sup>Copy in Mitchell Library, Glasgow.

<sup>4</sup>*The Assembly's Shorter Catechism in Metre* (Edinburgh, 1727).

<sup>5</sup>Probably compiled by William Roch.

<sup>6</sup>F.J.H. Darton, *Children's Books in England* (Cambridge, 1932), p. 53.

<sup>7</sup>Xenophon and Xantippe are sometimes used.

<sup>8</sup>A.J. Belford, *The Centenary Handbook of the Educational Institute of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1946).

<sup>9</sup>Carruthers, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup>*The Atom of Delight* (London, 1956), pp. 131-3.

<sup>11</sup>pp. 40-7, *passim*.

<sup>12</sup>No copy of the first edition has been found.

<sup>13</sup>NLS, MS. 577.

<sup>14</sup>Elphinstone's advertisement in the *Caledonian Mercury* of 10 June 1786 reads: "Orthography diffizes and transmits oddher Tungs; Ours continnues inaccessible, while unrepresented. London speaks won language, and hidderto writes annodher. Dhat Brittish Litterature be no more so disonored and disguized; now is elegantly printing...Propriety ascertained in her Picture; or, English Speech and Spelling rendered mutual guides. By James Elphinston." Elphinstone, who conducted a school in London, was a friend of Dr. Johnson's.

<sup>15</sup>Dun seems to follow Watts and Dilworth, authors of text-books published in England, in providing lists of pronunciations. Watts lists some proper names and their pronunciation as: Cirencester--Sissiter; London--Lunnun; Ralph--Rafe; Ursula--Usley; Rotherhithe--Redriff.

<sup>16</sup>The title of the book is *An English Spelling-Book, For the use of Schools. In Three Parts. Part I. Treating of Letters, Syllables, and Monosyllables. Part II. Treating of Dissyllables and Polysyllables. Part III. Containing Observations on Pronunciation and Orthography, by way of Question and Answer. With a Preface, Concerning the Method of Teaching to Read and Spell English, Particularly Adapted to this Book* (Edinburgh, 1757).

<sup>17</sup>Preface, pp. vi, xi, and xiv.

<sup>18</sup>*The Orthoepy of the English Language Simplified* (Edinburgh, 1817), p. 21.

<sup>19</sup>*An Account of the Edinburgh Sessional School*, 5th edn. (Edinburgh, 1840), p. 181.

<sup>20</sup>No separate copy of this work is known; quotations are from Wood's *Account*.

<sup>21</sup>J.P. Kay, "Report on the Training of Pauper Children," *Parliamentary Papers* (1837-8), 28, 151.

<sup>22</sup>Blackboards were invented sometime about 1823: Professor Pillans, formerly Rector of the High School of Edinburgh, has been given credit for the invention.

I wish to thank the executors of the estate of Neil Gunn for permission to use the long quotation from *The Atom of Delight* which appears on pages 12-13.