#### CHAPTER TWO

# The Period of Religious Emphasis in Reading Instruction

# I. Motives for Teaching Reading

he threads of early American history are so inextricably interwoven with the warp and woof of English institutions and customs that one who studies any phase of colonial civilization must constantly seek explanation in its antecedent and contemporary in England. Consequently, in describing the motives, methods, and materials which characterized the earliest period of American reading instruction (1607–1776), it is necessary to examine the status of each of these aspects of reading in England, and then to trace the English influences as they entered into the more truly American products.

As the Church of England gradually changed its aims from Catholicism to Protestantism, the right of the church to control the schools continued to be an undisputed claim. In fact, fresh impetus was given to this already well established precedent of church control over education, in that the church now felt that it must tighten its grip on the schools in order to maintain the doctrines of the new religion and to implant them irrevocably in the minds of oncoming generations.

One of the most important of these doctrines was that each individual was directly responsible to God for his own salvation. He must not depend upon the interpretation of any mass or prayer, priest or pastor, but must read the Word of God directly and draw his own conclusions. If he were illiterate, he would be

compelled to rely upon someone else for this Biblical information and in so doing he would thwart the most fundamental concept of Protestantism. Thus it was that the new religion, for its own sake, was compelled to foster reading instruction. It may be of interest to note Luther's recommendation in regard to the course in reading:

Above all things, let the Scriptures be the chief and most frequently used reading book, both primary and high schools and the very young should be kept in the gospels. Is it not proper and right that every human being, by the time he has reached his tenth year, should be familiar with the holy gospels, in which the very core and marrow of his life is bound? (5: 321)

The extent to which this religious motive affected classroom instruction in England, and family life as well, is summed up by Foster Watson in *English Grammar Schools to 1660*:

The whole school round of religious observances, Catechisms, primers, and Bible reading shows the permeation of the school work with religious instruction. The ecclesiastical organization of the school in the Middle Ages had prepared the ground for a theological discipline in the seventeenth century. The old objective influences of a picturesque ceremonial religion gave way to a subjective Biblical atmosphere, and the school was continuously cast in a religious mould....

The Bible was the center of family religious life, known by all members of the family, read aloud morning and evening at family prayers, the sign and seal of the profession of religion, in a religious age. Family and school education were at one, in recognition of the importance of religion. (6: 60)

In New Discovery of the Old Art of Teaching School printed in London in 1660, the author, Charles A. Hoole, states the underlying motive of the English schools during this period.

Now because all our teaching is but mere trifling unless withal we be careful to instruct children in the grounds of true religion, let them be sure to get the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments. (7: 109)

We have seen, then, that the English Protestants considered one of the most pressing of their national duties to be that of providing school training which would give children a thorough grounding in their religious faith and such reading ability as would enable them to read the Word of God for themselves. This religious motive was the one that directed and controlled reading instruction in England at the time the early settlers migrated to America.

The pioneers of America were, in general, deeply religious. Many of these early settlers came from among those people and from those lands that had embraced some form of the Protestant faith, and their purpose in coming to America was to enjoy a religious freedom not possible in their own country. It was their religious convictions that caused these pioneers to face the dangers attendant upon the establishment of colonies in the wilderness of a new country, and it was these same religious convictions that caused them so courageously to endure the hardships with which they were confronted in the early years. As the religious motive was the all-controlling force in their lives, it is quite natural that one should find it permeating and directing the instruction in their schools.

Massachusetts was the leader in shaping the policies of early American schools. No better statement of the purpose for teaching reading in America during this period can be found than in a quotation from the famous law of 1647 passed by the General Court of Massachusetts:

It being one chief point of that old deluder, Satan, to keep men from the knowledge of the Scriptures, as in former times, by keeping them in an unknown tongue, so in these latter times, by persuading from the use of tongues, that so at last the true sense and meaning of the original might be clouded by false glosses of saintseeming deceivers, that learning might not be buried in the grave of our fathers in church and commonwealth, the Lord assisting our endeavors. It is therefore ordered that every township in this jurisdiction, after the Lord hath increased them to the number of fifty householders, shall then forthwith appoint one within their town to teach all such children as shall resort to him to write and read. (8: 60)

# II. Materials of Reading Instruction

The materials that constituted the reading course in England during the 16th and 17th centuries are described in the following paragraph in a way that not only instructs us as to the materials used, but at the same time gives us an appreciation of the religious atmosphere with which reading instruction was saturated at that time.

We have the ABC for children, and because there is no grace therein, lest we should lack prayers, we have the Primer and the Ploughman's prayer and a book of other small devotions, and then the whole Psalter, too. After the Psalter, children were wont to go straight to their Donat and their Accidence, but now they go straight to Scripture, and for this we have as a Donat the book of the Pathway to Scripture in a little book, so that after these books are learned well we are ready for Tyndale's Pentateuchs and Testament. (6: 33)

Hoole gives a more concise but less picturesque statement when he says,

The Primer, the Psalter, the Bible are to be used in teaching spelling and reading. Writing and casting accounts are to be taught. The Lord's Prayer, the Creed, the Ten Commandments and the Catechism are to be known by all. (7: 21)

It is evident that several different types of material for reading instruction were in use in Europe at the time the early colonists migrated to America. Whether they brought any of these reading materials with them is a matter of conjecture. Since the New England settlers came from sections of the country where hornbooks, primers, ABCs, and Psalters were commonly used, it seems quite likely that they would equip themselves with these materials in the prudential anticipation of instructing their young Johns and Priscillas. Although we cannot prove that the colonists actually conveyed reading materials to America with them, we have ample proof that they imported English reading materials rather generously throughout the colonial period. Some records bear evidence to this effect:

Just imported from London, and to be Sold by the Printer hereof, Bibles of several sorts, Testaments, Psalters and Primers.

(From New York Weekly Post-Boy, December 24, 1744)

H. Gaine at the Bible & Crown, in Queen-Street, has just imported in the Snow Irene, Captain Jacobson, from London, the following Books, viz...Bibles, Testaments, Common-Prayers of all Sizes, Psalters, Primmers, several sorts of School Books &c.

(From New York Mercury, June 7, 1756)

Just imported in the last vessels from London and Bristol, and to be sold by WRIGHT and YOUNG, at their store in the corner house opposite Doctor Murray's, near the Meat Market...testaments, psalters, spelling books, primers, shaded crewels, knitting needles, &c.

(From New York Mercury, July 18, 1757)

Having shown that English reading materials were used in America during colonial times, we may now proceed to a discussion of the different types of materials, both English and American, which characterized this period of reading instruction.

#### The Hornbook

The hornbook is the first piece of instructional material specifically mentioned in American records. This mention appears in a bill that Charles Liggett made out for cash, paid to his wife in 1678 (9: 264). The following item appeared among several articles listed in his bill:

May 1678 / for 1 horning book and paper—.8

The writer found no evidence of any hornbooks having been actually constructed in this country. In light of frequent references to importation from England, it is reasonably safe to assume that the English hornbooks were the ones commonly used. (See page 15 for the content of one hornbook of the period.)

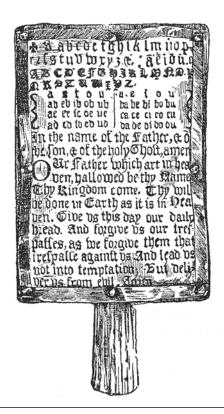
The hornbook seems to have been very popular throughout the colonial period. It was used in two capacities: for catechizing in church, and for giving children their first reading instruction in school. The following few items of interest are typical of those found rather generously distributed throughout the records of this period. In the "Diary of Samuel Sewell" (10: 344) under the date of April 27, 1691, is this entry:

This afternoon had Joseph to school to Capt. Townsend's mother's, his cousin Jane accompanying him, carried his hornbook.

In the records of the Old South Church in Boston for 1708 is the following entry:

Paid 1£ 10S. for horns for catechising.

Andrew Bradford advertised "Horn books for sale" in the *American Weekly Mercury* in 1727, 1730, and 1734. After he died, his wife advertised them frequently in the same paper from 1744 to 1746.



The hornbook was used for catechizing in church and for giving children their first reading instruction in school.

The last advertisement of hornbooks that the writer has been able to find in colonial newspapers appeared in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* of December 4, 1760. It advertised "Primers, Gilt Hornbooks or Plain Hornbooks." Since apparently it was not profitable to advertise hornbooks after this date, it seems quite likely that the use of this kind of reading material died out in American classrooms somewhere near the middle of the 18th century.

#### The ABC

The ABC seems not to have been popular for instructional purposes in America. We know that its use as a separate piece of reading material was continued in England throughout the first half of the 18th century, and undoubtedly some copies of the English ABCs found their way to this country. No mention, however, is made of the ABC in the advertisements of the times; so it would appear that the frugal American saw no need for this separate piece of material and was satisfied with the combined ABC and primer.

#### Psalters

Psalters were frequently mentioned as materials of instruction during this period. The following voluminous title on one Psalter published in 1760 is perhaps more enlightening than any other description that could be given:

#### THE NEW ENGLAND PSALTER

Improved by the addition of a variety of lessons in spelling, accented and divided according to rule. Likewise, rules for reading and particularly of the emphasis belonging to some special word or words in the sentence. Instructions for reading verse; as also of the different letters used in printed books, and particularly of the use of capitals, notes and points, made use of in writing and printing. Likewise, some account of the books of the old testament: of the books of the prophets: of the Apocryphal books, and of the books of the new testament. The whole being a proper introduction, not only to learning, but to the training of children in the reading of the holy scriptures in particular. (11: 1)

#### Primers Printed in America

The American Antiquarian Society of Worcester, Massachusetts, has a copy of *The Protestant Tutor*, printed by Sam Green and sold by John Griffin in Boston in 1685. Undoubtedly, this was the first

reading textbook printed in America. To understand its significance, one must turn back to its origin in England.

On February 27, 1679, Benjamin Harris, a printer by trade, advertised in his London newspaper a book called *The Protestant Tutor*. The preface is addressed "to all Protestant Parents, Schoolmasters, and School Mistresses of Children." This book was reissued in England in 1680 and again in 1695. In the meantime, the 1685 edition was printed in Boston. The principal contents were the "Roman Small Letters," the syllabarium, the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, the Ten Commandments, John Rogers's biography and verses, words of from two to seven syllables, the "Proper Names" (from Scripture), a catechism, and other religious selections.

The first reading textbook specifically designed for the American colonies was *The New England Primer*, and the first edition of this book was probably printed in England. In the *Stationer's Register* in London under the date of October 5, 1683, a certain John Gaine entered a title in accordance with the statute requiring the registration of all books for sale. This entry (12) reads:

Mr. John Gaine

Eodem Die et Anno. Entred then for his Book or Coppy Entituled the New England Primer or Milk for Babes with Win. Scoresby.

Jno. Gaine

The next mention of *The New England Primer* is found in an advertisement appearing in Newman's *News from the Stars*, Boston, 1690 (see page 18).

The book swept into wide popularity with Americans and succeeded in winning and holding their support as the standard text-book of reading instruction throughout the colonial period.



#### ADVERTISEMENT.

There is now in the Press, and will suddenly be extant, a Second Impression of The New-England Primer enlarged, to which is added, more Directions for Spelling: the Grayer of K. Edward the 6th. and Verses made by Mr. Rogers the Marsey, left as a Legacy to his Children.

Sold by Benjamin Harris, at the London Coffee-

Adouse in Boston

The New England Primer was advertised in an almanac entitled News from the Stars, published in Boston in 1690.

The earliest extant copy of *The New England Primer* is from an edition printed in Boston by S. Kneeland and T. Green in 1727. This copy is now in the Lenox Collection of the New York Public Library. The second earliest copy that has been preserved came to view as the result of an auction sale. The Labach family in Labachsville, Pennsylvania, died out after a residence of 200 years in America, and in 1903 their library was sold at public auction. M.D. High, a neighbor, bought this rare old book for 12 cents and later sold it to the publishing company Dodd, Mead, for the sum of \$2,500. Paul Leicester Ford presents a vivid picture of *The New England Primer* with the following description:

Here was no easy road to knowledge and to salvation; but with prose as bare of beauty as the whitewash of their churches, with poetry as rough and stern as their storm-torn coast, with pictures as crude and unfinished as their own glacial-smoothed boulders, between stiff oak covers which symbolized the contents, the children were tutored, until, from being unregenerate, and as Jonathan Edwards said, "young vipers, and infinitely more hateful than young vipers" to God, they attained that happy state, when as expressed by Judge

Sewall's child, they were afraid they "should goe to hell," and were "stirred up dreadfully to seek God." (4: 1)

The mechanical make-up of *The New England Primer* is quite evident in Ford's description. We might add that the shape and size of the book varied with its numerous editions. Sometimes it was square, sometimes oblong; but always it was a small book. The standard form in which it appeared most frequently was an oblong about 2 ½ by 4 ½ inches.

The stiff oak covers mentioned by Ford must have persisted far into the 18th century. The 1727 edition had wooden covers. The 1735 edition is thus described in the *Boston Evening Transcript*, June 15, 1904: "The book contains 104 pages and is bound in oak and leather. It is 3 ½ inches long and 3 inches wide."

The 1750 edition is described by the same newspaper (November 8, 1901) in this manner: "It is a small octavo in size, and the copy sold by Dodd, Mead is a fine complete example in the original wooden boards, leather back, flowered paper sides." The frontispiece was usually a portrait of the British monarch reigning at the time the edition was printed. Each book contained also a series of small pictures about 1 by <sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> inches in size, each accompanied by a verse designed to teach a letter of the alphabet. The picture often accentuated the gloomy message of the verse. For example, the verse for *R* was

Rachel doth mourn For her first born. (13: 10)

This verse was illustrated with the picture of a woman standing at the foot of a cot upon which a child reposes, apparently stiff and dead. For Y we find this verse:

Youth forward slips, Death soonest nips.

	NEW E	NGLAND I	PRIMER.	5
EASY SYLLABLES FOR CHILDREN.				
Ab	$\mathbf{e}\mathbf{b}$	ib	$\mathbf{ob}$	ub
ac	ec	ic	oc	uc
ad	$\mathbf{ed}$	id	od	ud
af	ef	if	of	uf
ag	eg	ig	og	ug
aj	eg ej	ij	oj	uj
al	el	ig ij il	ol	ul
am	em	im	om	um
an	en	in	on	un
ар	ep	ip	op	up
ar	er	ir	or	ur
as	es	is	os	us
at	et	it	ot	ut
av	ev	iv	ov	uv
ax	ex	ix	ox	ux
az	ez	iz	oz	$\mathbf{u}\mathbf{z}$

In The New England Primer, the child started off with columns of two-letter syllables and within the next four pages progressed rapidly to words of five syllables.

The illustration accompanying this verse shows a hideous figure holding in his hand a huge spear which he is directing toward the head of a little child who stands near by. The illustrative features of the book were concluded with a picture of John Rogers about to be burned at the stake or, in some editions, actually being



The child was encouraged to learn to read by the use of a series of alphabet rhymes and pictures in The New England Primer. This page is from an edition of 1729.

consumed by the flames while "his Wife with nine small Children and one at her breast" stands gazing at the "sorrowful sight."

All these pictures were woodcuts in black and white, crudely drawn, poorly proportioned, and altogether unattractive and inartistic. The paper was rough and heavy. The type was small, about the size of that used in an ordinary newspaper of the present time, and the lines were set close together.

The selections in *The New England Primer* varied slightly from time to time, but its standard content remained practically the same throughout this entire period. The first page and a half were devoted to the alphabet, vowels, consonants, double letters, italics, and capitals. After these came the syllabarium, beginning with two-letter syllables and gradually increasing in length until six-syllable words were given. Following the syllabarium came the famous alphabet verses. These were sentences of religious or moral import, arranged in the form of couplets, each couplet containing some outstanding word to illustrate a letter of the alphabet.

The alphabet verses were followed by "An Alphabet of Lessons for Youth," which consisted of sentences from the Bible arranged in alphabetical order according to the first letter of each sentence. The Lord's Prayer and the Creed usually found a place after these alphabet sections; then came the famous verses which John Rogers, the martyr, bequeathed to his children, "That you may see your Father's Face when he is Dead and gone." There were a few other little verses scattered here and there, of which the following is representative:

I in the Burying Place may see
Graves shorter there than I;
From Death's Arrest no Age is free,
Young children too may die;
My God, may such an awful sight,
Awakening be to me!
Oh, that by early Grace I might
For death prepared be. (13: 22)

The authorship of *The New England Primer* is generally ascribed to Benjamin Harris, the Englishman who also first printed *The Protestant Tutor*. Harris's trade as a printer, coupled with

his propensity for scribbling verse and his devotion to the Protestant religion, apparently constituted the right combination for the production of just such a book as *The New England Primer*. Although much of the material was taken directly from the Bible, Harris paraphrased the biblical content of the alphabet verses and probably originated some of the other verses. The two catechisms most generally used were "The Shorter Catechism" composed by the Reverend Assembly of Divines at Westminster, and "Milk for Babes" written by Cotton Mather, the famous New England minister. *The New England Primer* was by far the most popular textbook of the period.

In 1747 Z. Fowle printed in a single edition 10,000 copies of the New England Primer.

Accounts of Franklin and Hall show that that firm, between the years 1749 and 1766, printed and sold 37,100 copies. (4: 84)

A careful count of all editions recorded reveals the fact that 22 editions were printed between 1727 and 1776, a period of 49 years.

## Spellers

In spite of the popularity of *The New England Primer*, its career did not pass unchallenged. The chief books with which it had to compete were spellers whose function was not only to teach spelling, but also to teach reading, religion, and morals. One of the first spellers to gain admission to American schools was *England's Perfect School–Master* by Nathaniel Strong. The following description of this book in the *Boston News Letter*, August 12, 1706, is revealing not only as to the nature of this particular book, but also in respect to the motives, methods, and contents of reading instruction in general.

The following books to be sold by Benjamin Elliot in his shop under the West-End of the Town-House in Boston, Viz.

England's Perfect School-Master: or, Directions for exact spelling, reading and writing: Showing how to spell or read any Chapter in the Bible, by four and twenty words only; with Examples of most words, from one to six syllables, both in whole words and also divided; with Rules how to spell them: also how to spell all such words which are alike found, yet differ in their sense and spelling. Together with the true meaning and use of all stops and points to be observed by all that would Read and Write well; with a table of Orthography, shewing how to write true English: Also a variety of Pieces, both English and Latin Verse, on the most remarkable passages mentioned in Scripture, very useful for Writing Schools.

This speller, entitled *England's Perfect School-Master*, was first printed in America by B. Green in Boston in 1710, according to Charles Evans's *American Bibliography of Printing* (14: ¶1487). Several editions were printed after that time, but by the middle of the century it had retired in favor of other popular spellers.

Instructions for Right Spelling by George Fox, an English clergyman, was used in America throughout the first three quarters of the 18th century. It first appeared from the American press in 1702 and was printed in this country repeatedly during the 75 years (14: ¶1049).

The copy of Fox's speller that the writer examined was one of an edition printed in 1760 (15). This little book was about 4 by 6 inches. It was bound in brown leather, was made of rough, unglazed paper, and contained no pictures. The lines of print were close together, but the type was a little larger than that of other schoolbooks of the period, being about the size found in the usual third reader of the present time.

The aims of this speller were clearly stated in its title, which read thus: "Instructions for right spelling and plain directions for reading and writing true English." In later editions the following lines were added: "With several delightful things very useful and necessary for both young and old to read and learn." An examination of the book revealed the following "delightful things":

three pages of small letters and capital letters; three pages of syllables, increasing in length; several "Child's Lessons" composed of short religious sentences; proper names in Scripture with their "Syllables and their Significance"; a few pages of information regarding weights and measurements and many "memorable passages mentioned in Scripture, necessary and delightful for children to read and learn." The first "Child's Lesson," which appeared following the syllabarium, is given below:

Christ is the Truth. Christ is the Light. Christ is the way. Christ is my life. Christ is my Savior. Christ is my Hope of Glory. (p. 9)

Perhaps the most successful of the spellers of this period was Thomas Dilworth's *A New Guide to the English Tongue*. The first edition of this book was issued in England in 1740. The first American reprint was made by Benjamin Franklin in 1747. Fourteen additional reprints were made in America between this date and 1778. The 1770 edition (16) was 4 by 6 inches in size and was bound in leather. The typographical features were the same as in all other books of the period. This speller, however, had one feature which none of the contemporary spellers displayed—a series of 12 crude little woodcuts,  $2\sqrt[3]{4}$  by 3 inches.

From the standpoint of content, this book is important in that it contained a considerable amount of secular material. Several pages were given over to rules for the correct spelling and writing of English. A still greater innovation was the inclusion of twelve fables. They were highly moral in tone, but at least the fables were a departure from the strictly religious material of the past. Forty-eight pages of the book were devoted to the usual lists of words ranging from one to seven syllables. As if he dared not break with the precedent of the past, Dilworth devoted all the remaining pages in his speller to religious materials. There were many lessons for beginners consisting of short sentences taken from the Psalter; there were "Public Prayers for Use in Schools in the Morning"; and in some

editions, the Shorter Catechism also was included. The first lesson following the syllabarium read as follows:

#### LESSON 1

The eye of God is on them that do ill.

Go not from me, O God, my God.

The Lord will help them that cry to him.

My Son, if thy Way is bad, see that you mend it.

Another popular speller that made its appearance toward the middle of the 18th century was *The Child's New Plaything* also published in England. It had gone through two editions in England before it was printed in America. According to Evans, the first American edition was printed by Joseph Edwards in Boston in 1744, and by 1765 there were four more editions.

The 1750 edition (17) was a paper-covered volume measuring 3 by 6 inches. It contained no pictures and had the same typographical features as other schoolbooks of the time. Its complete title read thus:

Child's New Plaything: or, Best Amusement: Intended to make the learning to read a diversion instead of a task. Consisting of Scripture-Histories, Fables, Stories, Moral and Religious Precepts, Proverbs, Songs, Riddles, Dialogues, etc.

From the title it is immediately obvious that this book further emphasized the tendency to include secular material. The greater part of its secular text consisted of moralistic fables, precepts, and admonitions. There were, however, two pages of riddles on such subjects as the year, the age, and a reflection in a mirror; and for the first time we find three real stories that were entitled "Earl of Warwick," "St. George and the Dragon," and "Reynard, the Fox." The first four pages of the book were devoted to the alphabet. The succeeding 45 pages contained lists of syllables interspersed with

moral and religious precepts and the history of Noah's flood. Following is a sample from the first reading lesson:

### LESSON 1 MORAL PRECEPTS

Only by pride cometh Contention. He loveth Transgression that Loveth Strife.

The fables were followed in each case by a paragraph pointing out the moral implication. There were two dialogues, of which the following excerpt is representative:

- A. What is the usefullest thing in the world?
- B. Wisdom
- A. What is the pleasantest thing in the world?
- B. Wisdom.

There were two other English spellers that came into wide use during the second half of the 18th century. One of these was Fenning's *The Universal Spelling-Book*, which appeared in 1755 and contained "Tables of words, Lessons both moral and divine, Fables and pleasant Stories, and a very easy and approved Guide to English Grammar." The other popular speller was William Perry's *The Only Sure Guide to the English Tongue*, which offered the usual lists of words; religious selections consisting of stories, hymns, the Ten Commandments, and some prayers; a chapter on manners; and a few illustrated fables.

These spellers by Dilworth, Fenning, and Perry, along with *The Child's New Plaything*, foreshadowed two changes that gradually and rather generally took place during the last quarter of the 18th century. These changes were the transition from strictly religious to moralistic content and the inclusion of other secular materials such as stories, riddles, and dialogues.

### The Vocabulary of Readers

The controlling principle governing the vocabulary selection in all the readers of this period was that of proceeding from the simple to the complex in respect to the number of letters and syllables in words. The individual letters always came first, then lists of one-syllable words, followed by lists of two-syllable words, and so on up to words of five and six syllables. No provision was made for the repetition of words to insure adequate practice, and a great many words occurred only once throughout the reader; nor was any attention given to the distribution of words by pages. One finds the rate of introduction in the first five pages of the primers of this period ranging all the way from twenty to one hundred new words per page.

# III. Methods of Teaching Reading

Direct references to the methods used in teaching reading during the period of colonization are very rare. However, the arrangement of materials in books used by the colonists, as well as the voluminous titles with which these books were endowed, bear out the assumption that the methods described as being generally practiced in England at that time were the ones used also in America. So it would seem that in treating the reading methods of the period one could do no better than to describe the entire course of teaching reading in Hoole's picturesque words, from his New Discovery of the Old Art of Teaching School, with an incidental reference to other English or American authors, when it seems that such reference will add interest and clarity to the description.

In 1612, Brinsley in his "Ludus Literarius" suggested a new method of teaching the alphabet. In this treatise he pointed out the desirability not only of having the child learn the ABC by rote, forwards and backwards, but also of requiring him to point out which is *a*, *b*, *c*, *d*, or any other letter, first in the alphabet,

then "in any other place." He also suggested that one letter be learned at a time, whereas the custom appears to have been to learn the entire alphabet first. Brinsley's suggestion must have been rather generally adopted, as is shown in a statement in Hoole's book, published in 1660.

The usual way to begin a child when he is first brought to Schoole is to teach him to know his letters in the Horn-book, where he is made to run over all the letters in the Alphabet or Christ-cross row both forwards and backwards, until he can tell any of them, which is pointed at, and that in the English character....

The greatest trouble at the first entrance of children is to teach them how to know their letters one from another, when they see them in a book altogether....

Some have therefore begun but with one single letter, and after they have shewed it to the childe in the Alphabet, have made him to find the same anywhere else in the book, till he knew that perfectly; and then they have proceeded to another in like manner, and so gone through the rest.....

Some have contrived a piece of ivory with twenty-four flats or squares, in every one of which was engraven a single letter, and by playing with a childe in throwing this upon a table, and shewing him the letter only which lay uppermost have in a few days taught him the whole alphabet.

Some have made pictures in a little book or upon a scroll of paper wrapt upon two sticks within a box of iceing-glass and by each picture have made three sorts of that letter, with which its name beginneth; but those being too many at once for a childe to take notice on, have proved not so useful as was intended.

Some likewise have had pictures and letters printed in this manner on the back side of a pack of cards, to entice children, that naturally love that sport, to the love of learning their books. (7: 35, 36, 37)

After having mastered the alphabet, the child was inducted into the syllabarium. In regard to this phase of the work, Hoole says,

The common way to teach a child to spell, is, after he knows the letters in the Alphabet, to initiate him into those few syllables, which consist of one vowell before a consonant, as, ba, be, bi, bo, bu, etc., in the Horn Book, and thence to proceed with him little and little to the bottom of the book, hearing him twice or thrice over till he can say his lesson and then putting him to a new one. (7: 39)

Clifton Johnson in *Old-Time Schools and School-Books* affords us an additional glimpse of the customary use of memorization and spelling methods in his description of the dame schools of the period. He says that while the dame "heard the smaller pupils recite their letters, and the older ones read and spell from their primers, she busied her fingers with knitting and sewing, and in the intervals between lessons, sometimes worked at the spinning-wheel." Learning the alphabet and the syllabarium was a preparation for the real business of reading, which began when the child attacked the primer itself. Hoole thus describes the method used in the teaching of the primer:

After they have got some knowledge of their letters and a smattering of some syllables and words in the horn book, to turn them into the ABC or Primer and therein to make them name the letters, and spell the words, till by often use they can pronounce (at least) the shortest words at first sight. (7: 41)

The Lord's Prayer, the Creed, the Ten Commandments, and other religious materials were to be memorized by the child, and as Hoole suggests:

[W]hich he will do the more cheerfully, if he be also instructed at home to say them by heart....

When he is thus well entered in the Roman characters, I would have him made acquainted with the rest of the characters now in use, which will be easily done by comparing one with another, and reading over those sentences, Psalms, Thanksgivings and Prayers till he have them pretty well by heart. (7: 50, 52)

Among the few direct references to method is a statement in *The New England Primer* that follows the syllabarium and alphabet verses. It verifies the method of memorizing as described by Hoole.

Now the child being entered in his Letters and Spelling, let him learn these and such like Sentences by heart, whereby he will be both instructed in his Duty, and encouraged in his Learning. (13: 16)

Having been "graduated" from the primer, a child was permitted to read from the Bible, resorting to spelling as the only technique he knew for solving new words. Many passages of the Bible also were memorized. Let us turn to Hoole's interesting description of this phase of reading instruction.

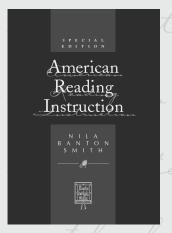
When he can read any whit readily, let him begin the Bible, and read over the book of Genesis (and other remarkable Histories in other places of Scripture which are most likely to delight him) by a chapter at a time; but acquaint him a little with the matter beforehand, for that will entice him to read it, and make him more observant of what he reads. After he has read, ask him such general questions out of the Story as are most easie for him to answer, and he will the better remember it. I have known some, that by hiring a child to read two or three chapters a day, and to get so many verses of it by heart, have made them admirable proficients, and that bettimes, in the Scriptures. (7: 52)

It is quite obvious that the subject matter of early reading instruction was a much more important consideration than was the method of teaching reading. Method was considered incidentally as a tool in furthering the fundamental aim of acquainting children with the content needed in their early religious life and equipping them to read the Bible in meeting the needs of their later religious life.

The techniques used were those of learning the alphabet, spelling syllables and words, memorizing sections of content, and reading orally. All children were inducted into the reading process through the alphabetical method because that was the only reading approach known at that time. Memorization was perhaps a natural correlate of the religious materials used and the religious motive for teaching them. The Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and other articles of faith were so important in the religious life of the early settlers that they deemed it necessary for all children to memorize them in their "green and tender years." The catechism, which made up the bulk of The New England Primer, was to be learned verbatim, so that when that eventful day arrived on which the child was catechized by the minister, he would deport himself commendably by answering every question unfalteringly and unerringly. As for the Bible, it was quite customary to memorize long passages of Scripture, so that they could be quoted with ease and fluency whenever the occasion called for them.

Oral reading also played an important role in the lives of these people. There was a great dearth of reading materials during the colonial period. The Bible, generally speaking, was the only book the home libraries contained, and many families did not have even a Bible. Furthermore, illiteracy was highly prevalent at that time; so it was customary for the uneducated members of the family or the community to gather in little groups in the evenings and on Sabbaths to listen to the oral reading of the Scriptures by one who had mastered the art of reading. Thus we see that oral reading met a real social need in our earliest period of reading instruction.

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