

EARLY QUAKER EDUCATIONAL BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

Quaker writers did not enter the field of entertaining books for children until the end of the eighteenth century with authors like Priscilla Wakefield and Maria Hack, but there are a number of earlier instructional books by Quakers that are rarely, if ever, mentioned in the standard histories of children's literature. Harvey Darton does refer to the *Battle-door for teachers and professors to learn singular & plural* (London: Robert Wilson, 1660), written by George Fox, John Stubs and Benjamin Furley, but this is a lively polemical work on what early Quakers felt was the misuse of *thou* and *you* in the social usage of their time. Illustrated with copious examples from many languages, it is more a linguistic tract than a book written for children.¹ This book is also noted by Humphrey Carpenter and Mari Prichard,² but under Fox's name they first mention another book that has a definite claim to be regarded as a book for children. This is entitled *A primmer and catechism for children: or a plain and easie way for children to learn to spell and read perfectly in a little time*, by G. and E.H. ([London]: printed in the year, 1670).³

The authorship of this little book, 144 pages long, is credited to George Fox and Ellis Hookes. Fox was of course the founder of the Religious Society of Friends, and Hookes was the first secretary. It seems odd that the initial of Fox's surname was not printed. The book opens, as was common practice in works of this kind, with a number of alphabets in various fonts, the letter I doing service for I and J, and similarly V for U and V. After them follow words (some of them quite long) divided into syllables under each letter of the alphabet. Then comes 'The Childs Lesson': 'Christ is the Truth. Christ is the Light. Christ is my Way. Christ is my Life. Christ is my Saviour. Christ is my hope of Glory.' etc. This leads on to a long summary of the Old and New Testaments. The Catechism (pp. 58-90) focuses particularly on Christ.

As with the famous epistle addressed to the Governor of Barbados in 1671,⁴ Friends were concerned to emphasize that they held to the traditional doctrines of the Christian faith, however radically different they were in other respects.

After dealing with basic faith and quoting proverbs, Fox and Hookes's little book reverts to explaining consonants and syllables, followed by an explanation of 'hard words' (pp. 97-111). Then they deal with proper names in scripture and their significations in

English (pp. 112-30). Finally, they proceed to numerals, reckonings and weights and measures. Carpenter and Prichard point out that the Catechism is unusual in that the child asks the questions and the teacher gives the answers. They also inform us that the book, revised in 1673, went through at least twelve reprints in England up to 1769. It was also the first English spelling book to be published in America with an edition printed in Philadelphia in 1702.⁵

The popularity of Fox and Hookes's book was virtually eclipsed in America by the publication of *The New England primer*, a deeply Calvinist work that first appeared sometime between 1686 and 1690 and was reprinted by multitudes of printer-publishers up to nearly the end of the nineteenth century. The first surviving edition dates from as late as 1727, but between then and 1830 some 362 different editions are known. Over the course of its long history changes naturally occurred to the text, format and content.⁶ One of the aspects of *The New England primer* that strikes the modern reader strongly is its emphasis on being prepared for death. Mortality during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was much higher than it is now, and children were particularly at risk of succumbing to disease, harsh conditions and accidents. James Janeway's *A token for children* (1672) is the best known of books that put examples of holy deaths before child readers as an encouragement. It remained in circulation till the end of the nineteenth century. Quakers also shared this concern, as a number of tracts and other publications show. *The work of God in a dying maid* (1677), William Rogers, *A brief account of the blessed ends of the two sons ** of Colchester* (1709) and a couple of accounts in John Tomkins's *Piety promoted* (1701) are cases in point.⁷

Friends were interested in the provision of appropriate education for their children from an early period. John Punshon notes:

In 1668 George Fox set up a boys' school at Waltham Abbey in Essex, and a girls' school at Shacklewell near Hackney, a few miles down the River Lea on the eastern edge of London. Perhaps because of the contemporary apprenticeship system, Friends tended to favour boarding, and by 1671 it is estimated that there were at least fifteen boarding schools under the care of quarterly meetings quite apart from a large number of others opened by individual Friends, and often open to non-Quaker children.⁸

Probably some of these schools used Fox and Hookes's book in its various editions.

We now change scene to America and the latter part of the

eighteenth century. John Woolman (1720-72) of Mount Holly, New Jersey, is the Friend best known today from this period, but he is little, if at all, known as the author of *A first book for children*, written and first printed c. 1769. This slender work has recently been scrupulously edited and reprinted by James Proud in a collection of short writings by Woolman.⁹ It survives in a unique copy of the third edition, dated by Joseph Smith as 'around 1774'. This copy is held in Friends House Library, London. The 32-page booklet was printed and sold by Joseph Crukshank of Second-street, Philadelphia, and also by Benjamin Ferriss, stationer and bookbinder, in Wilmington. No other copy is known.

Joseph Crukshank printed a handful of other children's books that are listed in d'Alte A. Welch's *Bibliography of American children's books printed prior to 1821*.¹⁰ They include Isaac Watts, *Divine songs*, sixteenth edition, 1773?; John Huddleston Wynne, *Choice emblems, natural, historical, fabulous, moral, and divine*, 1790; Robert Dodsley, *Select fables of Esop*, 1786; William Darton, *Little truths better than great fables*, vols I and II, 1789; Cebes, *The circuit of human life: a vision*, third edition, 1790. William Darton (1755-1819), founder of the publishing firm that carried the family name in various combinations through much of the nineteenth century, was a Quaker. Joseph Crukshank was likewise a Quaker.¹¹

Woolman was a practical man and knew the hazards that books were liable to at the hands of children. Immediately after the title follows the sentence: 'Much useful reading being sullied and torn by children in schools before they can read, this book is intended to save unnecessary expense.' The Friends House Library copy is a fragile, unbound, unpaginated 32-page booklet bearing the signature 'SBirkbeck' at the top right-hand corner of the cover, i.e. p. 1. The text is printed throughout in roman; there is no use of italics (perhaps a pointer to simplicity). After printing the alphabet in capitals and lower case, there follows an extensive syllabary, beginning ba be bi bo bu and similarly through the rest of the alphabet, after which come ab eb ib ob ub, ac ec ic oc uc, and so forth. In the three-letter sequence, beginning bla ble bli blo blu, the child will begin to recognize the occasional actual word rather than a mere syllable.

Then we have nine short sentences that reflect the child's real-life experience and the simple morality that informs it:

The Sun is up my Boy,
Get out of thy Bed,
Go thy way, for the Cow,
Let her eat the Hay.

Now the Sun is set,
 And the Cow is put up,
 The Boy may go to his Bed.
 Go not in the Way of a bad Man;
 Do not tell a Lie, my Son.

The columns of four-letter words that come after this build on the child's developing knowledge of the two- and three-letter syllables, but with different combinations of the initial letters, viz. blab crab stab swab; chub club grub snub; bred bled fled shed. Everything is very carefully organized so that the child has patterns of familiar sequences to help him learn further (throughout the text the child is always a boy apart from one illustrative sentence where it prints 'The good Boy and the good Girl learn their Books'). When Woolman arrives at words of two syllables and, ultimately, of three and four syllables, the words in the initial row of each set present the syllable division firstly with hyphens and subsequently with a simple space. The child is thus led gradually and progressively forwards. The range of vocabulary increases from the simple and concrete to the complex and abstract, but all the steps relate to the child's growing understanding of the world and the social, moral and religious values around him.

In his introduction to *A first book for children* James Proud makes reference to the contrast in pedagogics between *The New England primer* and middle-colony Quakerism, which he locates primarily in their illustrative reading texts. This is true, but I think we can also see Woolman's values and attitudes implied in the shorter passages and even his choice of words in his various lists. It seems symptomatic and very appropriate that Woolman's first long Biblical passage focuses on the relationship of rich and poor in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. In his third long passage his focus is the parable of the Good Samaritan. In addition to these examples that explore the moral life and practice rather than theory, Woolman has a second passage that consists of various injunctions and brief quotations. These conclude with a few lines that encapsulate what many would regard as the spiritual essence of Quakerism:

God is our Re-fuge and Strength, there-fore will I not fear,
 though the Earth be re-mov-ed. Be-cause we trust in the liv-
 ing God, we shall not be a-fraid of ev-il Ti-dings, but in Qui-
 et-ness, and in Con-fi-dence shall be our Strength, may they
 say who faith-ful-ly fol-low Christ.

Within ten years of Woolman writing his primer the Philadelphia Quaker Anthony Benezet produced a different primer with the same title as Woolman's, *A first book for children* (Philadelphia: J. Crukshank, 1778). There is a copy of this too in Friends House Library. Since John Woolman died of smallpox in 1772 while on a religious visit to England, his friend Benezet may well have composed his primer because Woolman's was no longer available. Though the text is different, the format is similar with a syllabary and lists of words, increasing in the number of letters and syllables. Benezet intersperses the syllabary with little phrases, e.g. I am, he is, we go; An ax, an ox, to us. Later comes the verse: 'The sky is red, / Go now to bed. / Let all go up, / So we may sup.' After the four-letter words we find the statement 'The Lord sees all we do. / His eye is on all that fear him.' Gradually more and longer words are introduced, followed by religious quasi-credal passages and the beginning of the gospel story: 'Behold a virgin shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.' Pages 31-32 of this little booklet concludes with ten quatrains headed 'The Danger of delaying Repentance'. The tenor of Benezet's primer is different from Woolman's, laying greater emphasis on doctrinal matters. It is not entirely clear whether the statement that 'The Lord sees all we do' is meant to be understood in terms of protection or of admonition. 'The Danger of delaying Repentance' also reads to us today like a veiled threat. On the more practical aspect of learning letters and words Benezet's work does not evince the same care and teaching experience that is evident in Woolman's booklet. The differences between the two primers probably arise from the two writers' individual personalities more than from any general religious change over the period of less than a decade.

Interestingly, there is a further brief publication that we can consider in the context of the education of Quaker children. This is Abiah Darby's *Useful instruction for children. by way of question and answer. In two parts* (London: Luke Hinde, 1763). This was not conceived as a primer, but as a catechism such as we find in Fox and Hookes's *Primmer and catechism* and in *The New England primer*, which we know had an English antecedent in Benjamin Harris's *Protestant tutor*.¹² Abiah Darby's booklet, as she explains in her introductory remarks 'To Parents of Children', was compiled for her own children and the children of others in the meeting to which she belonged (Coalbrookdale). Although she admits she knows of similar 'greatly superior' productions she had 'a Desire to have it generally spread among the little Children of our Society, for their Instruction'.

Abiah Darby (1716-93) was the second wife of Abraham Darby II (1711-63). Born in Sunderland, she married Abraham in 1746, and they had seven children of whom three died in infancy. In 1748 she felt a call to the ministry and with the complete agreement of her husband undertook several ministerial journeys. She gave brief accounts of her ministerial visits in her journal, which is the basis for Rachel Labouchere's biography.¹³ Abiah's journeys were often linked with attendance at Yearly Meetings in Wales and London and visits to her relatives in Sunderland. She often bewailed the fact that in various localities Friends had done little to facilitate meetings for her. In any case she did not always feel the call to speak. Without independent witnesses it is hard to gauge the impact that she made.

The first publication of *Useful instruction for children* was printed in London by William Phillips of George Yard, Lombard Street, in 1754 and widely distributed in the Society. A later edition came from Luke Hinde at the Bible in George Yard in 1763, the year of her husband Abraham's death (23 March). Abiah's procedure in *Useful instruction* was to give a simplified outline of the Old Testament in Part I and the New in Part II in question and answer form. Interestingly, Part I consists of 106 questions, Part II of 84, though the number of pages allotted to each part is roughly equal (1-23 and 25-45). She focuses not so much on belief and doctrine as on factual information, i.e. names and deeds, particularly with regard to the Old Testament. Some of the questions are formulated in a leading manner, e.g. question 11: 'Did [God] give Man Dominion over the animal Creation? *Answ.* Yes; the Lord gave him Dominion over the Fish of the Sea, over the Fowls of the Air, and over every living Thing that moveth upon the Earth.' This Biblical passage can be viewed as particularly important in the era of colonial expansion and exploitation. Often it is omissions that strike the modern reader. For example, Eve is not singled out as temptress, but both Adam and Eve are guilty of disobedience in eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge. A little later, Abraham's readiness to sacrifice his son Isaac in obedience to God's command is not mentioned. A considerable amount of space is given to the quotation of the Ten Commandments, key verses from Psalms and Proverbs, and the Messianic prophecies of Isaiah and Micah.

When Abiah gets to the New Testament her questions and answers give a much stronger sense of Quaker difference from that of the Established Church. Her account of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour opens with the Johannine 'In the Beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' before going on to the Nativity stories from Luke and Matthew. Christ identifies

himself principally as the Light of the World, the Bread of Life, the Resurrection and the Life, the Good Shepherd and the True Vine. Abiah centres more on Christ's teaching than on matters of traditional belief. She quotes the Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer, talks about prayer more generally and emphasizes that 'God is a Spirit'. As far as baptism is concerned, she stresses the Quaker position that baptism is a matter of the spirit, not of water. Similarly, with regard to the Lord's Supper, she explains this as 'an inward and spiritual feeding upon Christ the Bread of Life'. Question 68 asks bluntly, *'Is the Ministry of Christ confin'd to Men only? Are not Women also call'd to that Work?'* The answer is: 'Male and Female are one in Christ. For this, as the Apostle *Peter* declared unto the Jews, is that which was foretold by the Prophet *Joel*; And it shall come to pass in the last Days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all Flesh, and your Sons and your Daughters shall prophesy.'

One further question (77) refers to another distinctive Quaker position, namely, the testimony against what is here called 'the Observation of Days and Times', i.e. particular days and feasts in the traditional Church calendar. Abiah is here somewhat elliptical, and not all of her readers would have understood what she meant:

Quest. 77. What saith the Apostle to the Galatians, concerning the Observation of Days and Times?

Answ. But now, after that ye have known God, why turn ye again to the weak and beggarly Elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in Bondage. Ye observe Days, and Months, and Times, and Years; I am afraid of you, lest I have bestow'd upon you Labour in vain.

Abiah does not label distinctive Quaker positions as such, but she includes them prominently in what she writes.

John Woolman's writings frequently advert to the danger of riches to those who seek simplicity of life and 'pure wisdom', and Abiah too concerns herself with advice to the rich as in the answer to her question 80:

Charge them that are rich in this World, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain Riches, but in the living God, which giveth us richly all Things to enjoy. That they do good, that they be rich in good Works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up in store a good Foundation, that they may lay hold on eternal Life.

This was undoubtedly a matter that touched Abiah Darby herself.

The various instructional books for children that I have discussed

here are not all of the same character. Both Woolman's and Benezet's booklets concentrate on the task of learning to read, while Darby focuses exclusively on basic Christian teaching as shown in the Bible and interpreted according to Quaker practice. Fox and Hookes, as in many other primers of this early period, combine the exercise of learning to read with a long catechism on Christian faith. It is surely no accident that Woolman provides reading practice mainly through passages from the Bible. Neither he nor Benezet follow the practice of *The New England primer* in illustrating their text with woodcuts and rhyming couplets to assist and reinforce children's learning. Early editions of the famous verses in *The New England primer* that begin with 'In Adam's Fall / We Sinned all' go on to give for K 'Our KING the good / No man of blood' and for O 'The Royal Oak / it was the Tree / That sav'd His / Royal Majestie.' Editions of 1777 and later replace these references with others mentioning Korah and Young Obadiah. The woodcuts, not only those for K and O, are comprehensively replaced.¹⁴ Benezet, however, is not quite as purist as Woolman in avoiding verse: he ends his booklet with ten quatrains on 'The Danger of delaying Repentance'.

It is interesting that three of the Quaker publications come from a quite short period in the late eighteenth century (1754-78). Carpenter and Prichard note that Fox and Hookes's *Primmer* was reprinted at least twelve times in England up to 1769 and that an American edition was printed in Philadelphia in 1702.¹⁵ By the 1770s it was presumably felt either that the *Primmer* was no longer serviceable or that the breakdown in relations between Britain and America necessitated home-grown American products.

What was used in Quaker schools in Britain before the founding of Ackworth (opened 1779) requires further investigation. Several non-Quaker books teaching children how to read were published in the course of the century. The catalogue of the Osborne Collection lists, for example, William Scoffin, *A help to true spelling and reading* (second edition 1705); Daniel Fenning, *The universal spelling book* (first published 1756); *A pretty book for children: or, an easy guide to the English tongue* (J. Newbery, S. Crowder, and B. Collins, tenth edition 1761; third edition advertised 1748); *The royal primer* (J. Newbery and B. Collins, [c. 1765]); Charles Vyse, *The new London spelling-book* (first published 1777); William Rusher, *Reading made most easy* (first published 1783).¹⁶ Around 1831 the poet John Clare (1793-1864) alludes to 'Fennings Spelling book' in a poem entitled 'Childhood', attesting to its use in rural Northamptonshire in the last decade of the eighteenth century.¹⁷ Whether any of these books were utilized by Quakers is doubtful.

Vyse's *New London spelling-book* had a long life, going on to be published until at least c. 1825, with improvements and additions. It was designed for young gentlemen and ladies and was more than a simple spelling-book. It contained a good deal of instruction about personal conduct, especially towards masters, governesses and social inferiors, about religion and morality, basic geographical information and so on. It was a more or less complete manual of polite education. The text and various lessons go well beyond the scope and age-range of what primers offered in the late eighteenth century.

Ackworth School produced in 1790 *The English vocabulary, or spelling book*. It was compiled by Jonathan Binns and printed by James Phillips. A second edition was published by Darton & Harvey in 1806. A twenty-first edition appeared c. 1845.¹⁸ This work, amounting to 172 pages in the sixth edition (1815), was designed for pupils who had already learnt to read. It was not so much a lesson book as a work of reference with long alphabetical lists of words consisting of a particular number of syllables, providing information about pronunciation, stress and so-called silent letters. A lengthy appendix listed words pronounced the same, but spelt differently. Finally, there was an alphabetical collection of moral and practical observations, described as 'Very useful for Copies, and which ought to be learned at an early Age'. It began with 'Anger should never punish, Avoid all affectation. Avoid evil company' and ended with 'Zeal needs caution, Zeal often lessens charity. Zeal without knowledge is like wild fire'.

A few years later, in the spring of 1795, the first edition of Lindley Murray's *English grammar, adapted to the different classes of learners* (London: Darton and Harvey) was published, having been written at the request of teachers at the girls' school in York founded by Esther Tuke. Murray's *A first book for children* and *An English spelling-book* (York: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme; London: Darton and Harvey) followed in 1804. Lindley Murray (1745-1826) was an American Quaker lawyer from New York, who came to England for the sake of his health and stayed the rest of his life. His *English grammar* and other educational writings, which included *The English reader* (1799), dominated the first half of the nineteenth century in a vast number of editions. Murray's work lies outside the scope of this article, both temporally and in terms of its publication history.¹⁹ What it reveals is a quantum leap from the mid-eighteenth-century concentration on educational (including religious) material for the restricted circle of the Society of Friends to the broad general world of nineteenth-century children's education.

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ENDNOTES

1. F. J. Harvey Darton, *Children's books in England: Five centuries of social life*, third edition, revised by Brian Alderson (Cambridge, etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 61-62, See also Judith St. John, *The Osborne Collection of early children's books 1476-1910. A catalogue* (Toronto: Toronto Public Library, 1975), vol. II, 708-09, for details of the copy in the Osborne Collection.
2. Humphrey Carpenter and Mari Prichard, *The Oxford companion to children's literature* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 189.
3. Copy in the Library of the Religious Society of Friends, Friends House, Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ.
4. See *The Journal of George Fox*, ed. John H. Nickalls (Cambridge: at the University Press, 1952), 602-06.
5. Carpenter and Prichard, 189.
6. Carpenter and Prichard, 376-77, and Charles F. Heartman, *The New England primer issued prior to 1830* (Manfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2005).
7. See David Blamires, *Quakerism and its Manchester connexions*. An exhibition held in the John Rylands Library, 6 February-23 May 1991 (Manchester: JRULM, 1991), 15. The first two items are tracts forming part of the Midgley Library, now transferred to the John Rylands Library, Deansgate, Manchester.
8. John Punshon, *Portrait in grey: a short history of Quakers* (London: Quaker Home Service, 1984), 87.
9. James Proud (ed.), *John Woolman and the affairs of truth: the journalist's essays, epistles, and ephemera* (San Francisco: Inner Light Books, 2010), 129-45 (text 10).
10. D'Alté A. Welch, *A bibliography of American children's books printed prior to 1821* (American Antiquarian Society and Barre Publishers, 1972). See index and individual entries.
11. See Lawrence Darton, *The Dartons. An annotated check-list of children's books issued by two publishing houses 1787-1876* (London: The British Library; New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 2004), xxix.
12. See Charles F. Heartman, *The New England primer issued prior to 1830*, xvi.
13. Rachel Labouchere, *Abiah Darby (1716-93) of Coalbrookdale* (York: William Sessions, 1988).
14. See Patricia Demers & Gordon Moyley (ed.), *From instruction to delight: An anthology of children's literature to 1850* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1982), 30-33.
15. Carpenter and Prichard, 189.
16. Judith St. John, *Osborne Collection catalogue*, in the sections on 'Books of instruction'.

17. See John Clare, *The midsummer cushion*, ed. Kelsey Thornton and Anne Tibble (Ashington: Mid Northumberland Arts Group; Manchester: Carcanet, 1990), 102.
18. See Lawrence Darton, *The Dartons*, 3-4, entry G5.
19. See Lawrence Darton, *The Dartons*, xxi-xxii, 187-98, and Stephen Allott, *Lindley Murray 1745-1826, Quaker grammarian of New York and old York* (York: Sessions Book Trust, 1991), 27-38, 66-84.