SOME OLD SCHOOL BOOKS.

THERE is not much to interest the general reader in a parcel of old school books. If we pick up an old school book by chance, whether it be upon a bookstall or upon our library table, we are apt to toss it impatiently aside, as we do the newspaper of last month. And yet school books have an interest and a value of their own, since they are in some way an index to our educational progress, and they are among the first influences which are brought to bear upon the minds of our children.

The most ancient, and to antiquarians the most interesting of school books, is the Horn-Book. Some scholars believe it to be of classic origin ; but whether this be true or not, it is certainly very ancient. It has many points of resemblance to the present-day Reading Sheet ; enough to show that the one has descended in a direct line from the other, though of course in the matter of size the difference is great. Notwithstanding the thousands of horn-books that must have been in existence in the days of our great-grandfathers, there are very few existing now. Perhaps the most perfect one in a public collection is that in the British Museum, dated 1750, and a description of that is a description of horn-books generally.

It consists of a small square tablet of oak, with a handle, its shape being something like that of a common hand-mirror. Upon the tablet is a printed sheet, containing the alphabet, the vowels, words of one syllable, an invocation to the Trinity, and the Lord's Prayer. Round the edges of the sheet are nailed narrow strips of brass, which serve to hold it in its place, and at one time held the plate of horn that covered it. The plate in this, as in most other specimens, is, however, missing. The handle was usually pierced, in order that it might be suspended from the child's girdle, but the handle of this is imperforate. There is also a quarto horn-book in the Museum with the plate of horn remaining, but this is regarded as a forged specimen.

English literature is full of references to the horn-book. Shakspere, Ben Jonson, Shenstone, and Cowper, all speak of it, while Tickell has a long poem in praise of it, which he wrote during a fit of the gout. By far the most accurate description of the horn-book is that given by Cowper in his "Tirocinium, or a Review of Schools," a poem published in 1784 :—

> "Neatly secur'd from being soil'd or torn,
> Beneath a pane of thin translucent horn,
> A book (to please us at a tender age
> 'Tis call'd a book, though but a single page)
> Presents the prayer the Saviour deign'd to teach,
> Which children use, and parsons—when they preach

The horn-book was often called Christ Cross Row, which eventually became corrupted to Criss Cross Row, from the fact that the alphabet was always prefixed with a cross. In a document to be found in Earl de la Warr's collection of manuscripts, dated 1623, which contains a commission for the rating and valuing of goods, horn-books are quoted at threepence a dozen, and grammars at five shillings a dozen. The difference in the value of money then and now must be remembered in this connection.

Next in order comes the grammar book, and one of the earliest of these is "Grammar Questions, by John Stockwood, sometime schoolmaster at Tonbridge, and minister of the Word of God," published in 1590.

The glimpse we get of school life in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is the reverse of pleasant. Roger Ascham, in his book of the "Schoolmaster," and Thomas Ingeland, in his "Disobedient Childe," give us evidence of the cruelty common in boys' schools. Nicholas Udal, author of our first English comedy, who was master of Eton, was described as the "best schoolmaster and the greatest beater of our time."

Milton's "Tractate on Education," published in 1644, is well known, but another book throwing light

HORN-BOOK IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM.

on school life is not. On November 10, 1669, there was published "The Children's Petition, or a modest remonstrance of that intolerable grievance our youth be under in the accustomed severities of the School-discipline of this Nation." In it the gravest charges are brought against schoolmasters, and an appeal

"THE LONDON SPELLING BOOK" (1710).

is made to Parliament, "wherein are so many gentlemen of excellent parts and ingenuous reflections, and who some of them are not so old as to forget what was unhandsome, and yet we never hear of something tendered for the regulation of schools." The Parliament of 1669, however, was busy considering whether it would be safe and wise to give toleration to Catholics, and "The Children's Petition" fell upon deaf ears.

Another book, "Education with respect to Grammar Schools," published in 1701, makes it manifest that there were few good school books, much useless knowledge, and that the acquirement of such knowledge as there was, was made as dreary and uninviting as possible. Says the writer, "And further that that learning which is acquired at grammar schools is of little or no use to such as are set to ordinary trades, and consequently that time might be better spent in attaining some useful knowledge, nay, much more profitably in learning to write a good hand, arithmetick, and many other things of this nature."

The belief that good boys, who did their tasks regularly, and performed all the duties of life in a proper manner, would inevitably rise to wealth and distinction, was a very popular one in the eighteenth century. It has its comic side, but the service which this idea rendered to society was, that it taught men to value steady perseverance and honest work. It was made popular by Hogarth, in his "Industrious and Idle Apprentice," but it did not originate with him. The story of the two apprentices is found in a play called "Eastward Ho," from which he borrowed it, and the scenes of which are chiefly laid in East London. Its reputed authors were Ben Jonson, George Chapman, and John Marston.

This belief took a firm hold on the popular imagination, and it is very apparent in an admirable school play, written by Thomas Spateman, and published in 1742. Spateman says in his preface that it is to be read and acted only in schools, and therefore it may be fairly classed among school books. Father Time is a prominent character in it, and lectures the boys in a kindly fashion on the misfortunes that will befall them if they do not take him by the forelock. A certain number of school-boys, who neglect their lessons, treat the old gentleman with much disrespect, and threaten to cast stones at him. These all die in workhouses or gaols. Four others, who act in a perfectly correct and proper manner, and who never by any chance forget their tasks, become a bishop, a judge, a prime minister, and a courtier, respectively.

The story is well told, is full of vigorous dialogue, and contains many fine scenes, though it may be doubted if it was ever well acted, seeing that it was acted by school-boys. Father Time proses occasionally, but there is sound wisdom in his counsels, and the influence of the play could not have been other than good.

It is impossible to avoid noticing how frequently mothers object to their children being sent to school. When the brutality of school punishment is considered, there is something to be said for the maternal attitude. Foolish fondness may have had its influence, no doubt, but a woman's natural desire to protect

FRONTISPIECE TO "THE CHILD'S BEST INSTRUCTOR" (1757).

her child from cruelty must have been a powerful influence too.

Spelling books begin to get into general use at the beginning of the eighteenth century. One of the best of the early manuals is the "London Spelling Book," by John Urmston, a schoolmaster at Kensington, published in 1710. It contains a curious frontispiece, and a wonderful illustrated alphabet, in which G stands for gallows, a picture of the same, with two malefactors suspended thereon, being published for the edification of the youthful mind. M stands for murder, and is illustrated by a drawing of two individuals in deadly combat, one plunging a knife into the body of the other. Urmston was a terrible pedant, like the majority of dominies in the reign of Queen Anne, but he realised the needs of his time, and did his best to meet them.

Henry Dixon, a schoolmaster at Bath, Thomas Dyche, Thomas Dilworth, Jean Palairet, and John Kirkby, the arithmetician, all published books for schools with more or less success. Those of the first three remained in use for nearly a century, but Palairet's, although popular for a time, do not seem to have remained in use very long. In 1755 appeared the "Critical Spelling Book." The author, with a charming modesty, informs us that his book "is incomparably better than any that have yet been offered to the nation," and criticises with severity all others that are in use. He refers incidentally to the fear parents have of severe schoolmasters, and advertises himself as one of the most amiable of men. The pretty frontispiece to the "Child's Best Instructor," an edition of which appeared in 1757, illustrates the progress that had been made in the art of engraving as applied to children's books, when it is compared with the grotesque drawing which faces the title-page of Urmston's work. It is a neat and orderly schoolroom, filled with chubby little boys, all absorbed in their studies. A kindly-faced old man presides over them, and through the open doorway are seen the quaint buildings of a country town, while in the distance rises the spire of the church.

As time went on the field became full of workers, and school books multiplied with marvellous rapidity. Mrs. Barbauld, Francis Fox, and Hannah More, were busy each in their own sphere, while in 1741 was born at Ipswich, Sarah Kirby, who afterwards became Mrs. Trimmer; and in 1758, William Fordyce Mavor. Sydney Smith describes Mrs. Trimmer as "a lady who has gained considerable reputation at the corner of St. Paul's Churchyard; who flames in the van of Mr. Newberry's shop; and is upon the whole dearer to mothers and aunts than any other author who pours the milk of science into the mouths of babes and sucklings." He also sneers at her as a writer of "sixpenny books," though he is careful to tell us he has never seen one of them. But the witty Edinburgh Reviewer's criticisms will not alter the fact that, during her forty years of literary life, Mrs. Trimmer did a useful work for her day and generation. Her books are of no value now, but they supplied a pressing need then. Her "Charity School Spelling Book" is amusing enough from the present-day point of view, but it is full of genuine piety and sound common sense.

William Fordyce Mavor is known chiefly by his "Spelling Book," but he was one of the busiest of men in the production of popular literature. He was a Scotchman by birth, but entered the English Church, and became a clergyman. Nothing seemed to come amiss to his ready and indefatigable pen. Guide books, books of travel, works on history, agriculture, physical science, education, poems, essays, sermons, magazine editing, all were taken up with equal facility by him. The first edition of his "English Spelling Book" appeared in 1801, the last in 1885–6. Some very fine frontispieces adorn the early editions, though the ordinary engravings in the text are uncouth enough. He died in 1837.

Not less popular or useful was the "New London Spelling Book" of Charles Vyse, a teacher, of Vauxhall. The first edition was published about 1777, by Messrs. G. and J. Robinson, of Paternoster Row. At the sale of Messrs. Robinson's effects, some years later, the copyright was sold for £2,500, with an annuity of £50 a year for the author. The preface to the first edition is in striking contrast to the boastful prefaces of forty years previous. "I shall not," says the author, "follow the ungenerous, though common maxim, of endeavouring to raise the merit of my own performance by depreciating the labours of those who have written on the same subject. They have all used their best endeavours to promote the education of youth, and have, therefore, deserved well of the public."

No account of school books would be complete without reference to the swarm of little primers that were issued by Newberry, Crowder, Wilkinson, and others. Spelling primers, with Cinderella or Red Riding Hood attached, were very common, and so also were "Royal Primers," "authorised by His Majesty." The gallows did not go out of school books till near the middle of the present century, since in primers published in 1840 children were informed that—

> "R stands for robber, who died by the rope,"

and were taught the proverb, "Name not a rope to him whose father was hanged." The natural history, too, was of a remarkable character, a primer published in 1818 giving the following information about the whale:—

> "The whale is monarch of the main,
> As is the lion of the plain;
> He keeps the lesser fish in awe,
> And tyrant-like, his will is law."

The "Reader" will eventually supersede the old-fashioned spelling book in school education, but the spelling manuals will still have their value in home teaching. And this is as it should be, for with all their shortcomings they have done good work, since they have helped to form the minds and characters of the men and women that we know.

FREDERICK ROGERS.