

**MOTHER GOOSE'S  
MELODY, A FACSIMILE  
REPRODUCTION OF THE  
EARLIEST KNOWN EDITION**

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Mother Goose's melody, a facsimile reproduction of the earliest known edition by W. F. Prideaux

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**W. F. PRIDEAUX**

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MOTHER GOOSE'S MELODY

Mother Goose

MOTHER GOOSE'S MELODY

A FACSIMILE REPRODUCTION  
OF  
THE EARLIEST KNOWN EDITION

WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES  
BY  
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## INTRODUCTION

SEVERAL years ago, when occupied in investigating the sources of our traditional songs and ballads, I asked a kind and generous correspondent, the late Professor Francis James Child, of Harvard University, if he could afford me any information with regard to the earliest forms in which the old English nursery rhymes crossed the Atlantic. Professor Child, in a letter dated 25th February 1886, wrote to me: 'A collection of nursery songs was made in Boston as early as 1719: *Songs for the Nursery, or Mother Goose's Melodies for Children*. A copy was said to have been discovered in an old antiquarian library not very long ago, but afterwards could not be found. I meant to reprint this copy—it was somewhat imperfect—for the good of the world. *Mother Goose's Melodies* continues to be printed, but no one thinking fidelity of the least consequence, books bearing that title are arbitrarily

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altered, and filled out from Halliwell. The original collection seems to have been a very small affair, and the smaller the reprints the more chance of genuineness. I have ordered one which used to be sold in Boston, and will send it as soon as it comes to hand.'

Professor Child was presumably unable to procure this little book, as I never received it, nor, in the press of work attending the preparation of his monumental collection of *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, was he able to carry out the task of giving to the world his contemplated treatise on the literature of the nursery. In this particular his mantle fell upon the late Mr. William H. Whitmore of Boston, the eminent antiquary and genealogist. Mr. Whitmore devoted himself assiduously to the study of the subject, and after some years of diligent inquiry, during which he was successful in acquiring two early American copies of *Mother Goose's Melody*, he published a pamphlet in 1889 at Albany, New York, which in 1892 he amplified into a very valuable work, entitled *The*

*Original Mother Goose's Melody, as issued by John Newbery, London, circa 1760; Isaiah Thomas, Worcester, circa 1785; Monroe & Francis, Boston, circa 1825.* This book contained an interesting introduction by Mr. Whitmore, in which he traced the history of the little collection with a painstaking minuteness that left few gleanings for a successor to pick up, together with a facsimile of the earliest known American edition, and a reprint of the New York (1795) edition of Perrault's *Tales of Passed Times*. Of the two copies of the little book in the possession of Mr. Whitmore, both of which were printed by Isaiah Thomas of Worcester, Massachusetts, the earlier, which Mr. Whitmore considered on good grounds was dated not later than 1785, had unfortunately lost its title-page, while the other, which was stated to be the third Worcester edition, and was printed in 1799, was deficient in several leaves.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Notwithstanding these defects, at the auction sale of Mr. Whitmore's books in November 1902, the first copy realised as much as \$45, and the second \$30.

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Mr. Whitmore's investigations brought to light no evidence whatever of the existence of the supposed edition of 1719. The story seems to have originated in a misunderstanding. A literary man named Crowninshield, who died in 1859, apparently conceived a vague idea that he had seen this volume in the Library of the American Antiquarian Society—the 'old antiquarian library' of Professor Child. Amongst his acquaintances, he came across a gentleman of the name of Eliot, who was a great-grandson of Thomas Fleet, a well-known Boston printer, who carried on business between 1712 and 1758, and from whose press the little volume was supposed to have issued. Fleet was the son-in-law of a certain Mrs. Elizabeth Goose, and this fact seems to have established a tradition in the family that this lady was the veritable 'Mother Goose' of the *Melodies*. Mr. Crowninshield's presumed discovery lent weight to this legend, and the story having been published by Mr. Eliot in *The Boston Transcript* for January 14, 1860, it rapidly got into currency, and, crossing the