

**THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT
OF SCHOOL READERS
AND METHOD IN TEACHING
READING. [PP.109-195]**

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The Historical Development of School Readers and Method in Teaching Reading. [pp.109-195]
by Rudolph R. Reeder

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1373

BY
RUDOLPH R. REEDER

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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PREFATORY NOTE

NOTWITHSTANDING the active interest of recent times in the history of education, but little intensive work in that field has yet been done in America. Our early political, social and religious development have had their turn once and again with students and writers of history, and many books have been written upon Colonial customs, fashions, social life, and the industrial and political progress of the early years of the republic. For the history of what was done in the schools of those early times, and how they did it, we have odd scraps here and there in books chiefly devoted to some other phase of national progress, and brief summaries in a few outline histories of education. That the details of an educational development without a parallel in its conception and progress among other nations and systems are of great interest, no one will question. We are not yet so remote from the early stages of our growth as to render it impossible to consult original sources of information.

The first American journal of education was the *Academician*, published in 1818. Text-books by American authors did not begin to appear until after the war of the Revolution. A great deal of very interesting and important historical material belongs to earlier periods. To gather up this material and relate it to our present ideas and trends of progress is the pleasing task of the student of educational history.

The writer of this paper has selected one branch only of the common school curriculum, and attempted to trace it

through the successive stages which have preceded its present status. The chief difficulty in the problem has been to find complete sets and editions of school readers, and to sift out of the numerous series that which was original, of historic worth, and forward reaching in its tendencies and results. The text-book collections in the various libraries which have started them are scattering and incomplete. There are many school readers by American compilers which the writer has not examined. If the attics of New England and the older-settled portions of the Atlantic and middle western States should give up their rubbish, there would no doubt be found stowed away in dingy corners many old text-books of historic interest. When these treasures have been gathered up and brought together, a far more accurate and satisfactory work may be written than the present effort. If interest and research in that direction should be awakened by the following paper, the most sanguine hopes of the writer will be fulfilled.

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PART I

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL READERS

CHAPTER I

EARLY PRIMERS—THE NEW ENGLAND PRIMER

WHEN it was decreed by the forty-fifth canon of the Council of Mainz, in the year eight hundred and thirteen, that children should be taught the "fidem catholicam et orationem dominicam," not only was the extent of elementary instruction thereby determined, but also the subject-matter of school reading-book exercises.

In the Abecedarien of the period the alphabet and ab, eb, ib, columns were followed by the Credo and Paternoster; later, the Ave Maria, and, soon after the thirteenth century, the Benedicite and Gratias were included.

From Charles the Great till Luther no other material than the above appeared in school readers.¹ The Enschedé Abecedarium, which has been claimed to be the first specimen of printing with type, contained the alphabet, the Paternoster, the Ave Maria, the Credo, and two prayers. This was the elementary book of the Romish Church.²

The early primers of the Reformation were not only

¹ Ferd. Bünker, *Entwicklungsgeschichte des Volksschullesebuches*, p. 8 [Leipzig, 1898].

² Paul Leicester Ford, *The New England Primer*, p. 45.

school books but manuals of church service. In fact, the German word for primer—*Fibel*—which first appeared in a "*Kölner Glossar*" in 1419, signifies a little Bible.¹ Henry the VIII. issued proclamations and injunctions against the printing of unauthorized primers in his endeavor to keep his people true to Catholicism. A little later and after his "change of heart," he used the same weapon for fighting the Pope and issued his Reform Primer, designed to teach his people the true doctrine.²

Both Catholic and Protestant primers contained portions intended for children, including the alphabet. Hence, alphabet and creed became united in one book, which became the forerunner on the one hand, of the book of Common Prayer, and on the other, of the modern school primer. Catechisms with the ABC prefixed were common in England and Scotland in the seventeenth century. During the voyage of the *Arabella*, the Puritans were catechised by their pastor on Sundays, and no sooner were they landed than the colony of Massachusetts Bay made a contract with sundry "intended ministers for catechising as also in teaching or causing to be taught the Companyes, servants and their children as also the salvages and their children."³ In this same year, 1629, they voted the sum of three shillings for "2 dussen and ten catechisms."⁴

It is worthy of remark that the first Protestant primer contained no inconsiderable quantity of secular material. This was by no less an author than Philip Melanchthon. It was

¹ *Methodik des Deutschen Volksschulunterrichts*, p. 8. Also E. M. Field, *The Child and His Book*, p. 118.

² Field, *The Child and His Book*, pp. 123-128. Also Paul Leicester Ford, *The New England Primer*, pp. 4-9.

³ *Records of the Massachusetts Bay*, I, 37, e. Cited by Ford, *The New England Primer*.

⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 37, h.