

which they had last appeared at the Court of King's Bench, but the result of that trial caused the repeal of the Act under which the cause was brought. Soon afterwards, Lord Ellenborough framed a bill for the repeal of this Act of Elizabeth, when he said that he had been induced to do so by having had to preside at a trial some time previously in which its penalties had been enforced; he thought those penalties wrong, and he had brought in a bill to repeal the Act which enforced them. That bill became law.

[To be continued.]

The Horn Book :

IN LITERATURE AND ELSEWHERE.

By FREDERICK ROGERS.



ACCORDING to the modern definition of the word, a horn book was not a book at all. It possessed but a single page, and for its binding the carpenter and the horner, or worker in horn, were sufficient. Dr. Johnson in his famous dictionary says, "The horn book is a first book of children, covered with horn to keep it unsoiled." There is a contemptuous brevity in the great lexicographer's



description, as if the subject were but of trifling importance, and to those who had never seen a horn book it would convey no idea at all. And yet it was a common enough object in his day, being found in every nursery or schoolroom, and hanging at every child's girdle. It was usually made of wood, and shaped somewhat like an ordinary hand mirror, the handle being pierced for the purpose of tying it at

the child's waist. On the broad part of the wood, where the glass is placed in the mirror, was laid the sheet of paper or parchment, and over this was nailed the thin plate of horn which gave the book its name. The sheet contained the alphabet, which, from being preceded and terminated by a cross, was called "Christ Cross Row." This phrase became in common speech "Criss Cross Row." In Scotch horn books the cross was absent, its place being taken by curious signs not unlike the signs made by children when they learn to write, which are called pothooks and hangers. After the alphabet came the vowels and words of one syllable, then the invocation, held by our ancestors to be all-powerful in driving away evil spirits: "In the name of the Father, of the Son, of the Holy Ghost," and then the Lord's Prayer.

It was sometimes called the "battledore"; why, no one can quite tell, but some conjecture that it was because by its means children fought their first battle at the door of knowledge. Whatever may be the worth of the conjecture, the name has survived in the child's toy, the battledore, which, though larger, and used for the purpose of playing the familiar game of shuttlecock, still retains something of the horn book's shape. Being the first, and therefore the most important element in the education of a child, it naturally took many curious forms to adapt itself to its purpose. It became sometimes a sweetmeat, sometimes a toy, and occasionally a work of art. The confectioner made it of sugar, and painted the letters on its surface; the pastrycook of gilded gingerbread, the paper containing the letters being stuck on after the gingerbread was made ready to eat. In these forms it was a highly popular fairing at a country fair. Among wealthy people there is evidence that the horn book was carved and ornamented in an artistic manner. It lasted as a school book among us until the beginning of the present century, and went out when the cheap primers came in; and yet, in spite of its popularity and utility, so little has it been valued, that probably all the private and public collections and museums in England could not furnish twenty horn books between them, and not five of these would be perfect specimens. So rare has it now become, that advertisements offering considerable sums for unmutated copies have met with no response.

At an exhibition of the Horners' Company, held at the Mansion House, London, in October, 1882, only eight horn books were produced. This company, which dates from the reign of Henry III., and which, for the purposes of its exhibition, left no stone unturned to get ancient specimens of the horner's work, doubtless found the horn book, when it was in common use, a profitable branch of their industry; but even they could not gather in many copies. The British Museum possesses five or six specimens, but none of them are perfect. They are of various dates: one of them is supposed to be an Elizabethan specimen, the others are dated at various periods in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Two were printed at Aberdeen, and on these the cross is conspicuous by its absence. One exceedingly curious specimen was presented to the museum in 1845 by the eminent biblical scholar and editor of Bunyan's works, Mr.

Geo. Offor. This horn book is not entirely genuine : possibly Mr. Offor did not present it as a genuine specimen. The case is genuine enough, but the sheet under the horn is undoubtedly the work of a modern printer. On the back of the case is the following quaint inscription :—"What more could be wished for even by a literary gourmand under the Tudors than to be able to read and spell? To repeat that holy charm before which fled all unholy ghosts, goblins, or even the old gentleman himself to the very bottom of the Red Sea, and to say that immortal prayer which secures heaven to all who *ex animo* use it, and those mathematical powers by knowing units, from which spring countless myriads." The old Steine Museum at Antwerp has a very good specimen of a Flemish horn book, which fact disposes of the statements of those who contend that it is entirely of British origin and manufacture.

Art and literature alike have their word to say about the old-world primer. A once famous engraving, now entirely lost, called the "Virgin of the Horn Book," represented the infant Jesus in the arms of his mother learning his letters from the horn book. In the church of All Saints, York, there is, or was some years ago, over the communion table an old imperfect, but very fine, stained glass window, representing St. Anne teaching the Virgin Mary to read, and using a horn book in the task. St. Anne, according to the traditions of the early church, was the mother of the Virgin Mary. She is frequently represented as teaching her to read, but, except in the window referred to, I know of no case in which she is represented with the horn book. At the exhibition of the Horners' Company, before mentioned, the Rev. Walter Sneyd exhibited a horn book of the twelfth century, the cover of which had an open work pattern of interlaced foliage and fret border carved upon it. In the journal of the Archæological Society, January, 1853, there are two pictures of a horn book of the period of Charles II., which was discovered in pulling down a house of that time. In the twenty-ninth volume of the publications of the Percy Society there is a beautiful picture of a black-letter specimen of the days of Queen Elizabeth, but it is a matter for regret that in most illustrated editions of the history of England the horn book is entirely ignored.*

References to it in literature begin with John Florio, an English scholar of Italian origin, who, writing in 1598, speaks of "a childe's horne-book hanging at his girdle." In Shakespeare's play of "Love's Labour Lost," the boy Moth, speaking of Holofernes, says:—

"Yes! Yes! he teaches boys the horn book."

Ben Jonson writes a little later:—

"The letters may be seen *through the horn*
That makes the story perfect."

Matthew Prior, poet and politician in the days of William the III. and of Queen Anne, in a metaphysical poem called "Alma," written about the year 1717, describes the horn book as the pastrycook made it:—

"To Master John, the English maid
A horn book gives of gingerbread;
And that the child may learn the better,
As he can name he eats the letter,
Proceeding thus, with vast delight
He spells and gnaws from left to right."

Thomas Tickell, one of the contributors to *The Spectator*, and a poet of no mean order, beguiled the pains of an attack of gout by writing a poem in praise of the horn book. It is but little read now, but it has some good descriptive passages scattered through it, as the following will show:—

"But how shall I thy endless virtues tell,
In which thou durst all other books excel?
No greasy thumbs thy spotless leaf can soil,
No crooked dogs' ears thy smooth corners spoil,
No idle pages, no errata stand
To tell the blunders of the printer's hand;
No fulsome dedication here is writ,
No flattering verse to praise the author's wit;
The margin with no tedious notes is vexed,
Nor various readings to confound the text;
All parties in thy literal sense agree,
Thou perfect mirror of concordancy."

John Locke, the philosopher, Shenstone in his poem of the "Schoolmistress," and William Cowper in his "Tirocinium," have each of them references to the book that has now vanished from among us for ever. Cowper's lines, which were written in 1784, are worth quoting:—

"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 called a book, though but a single page
Presents the prayer the Saviour deign'd to teach,
Which children use, and parsons when they preach."

But though it has gone it should not be forgotten. It links us with a bygone world, and its characters, seen dimly through the plate of horn that covered them, may seem to us as typical of their time: typical of the struggle that was going on between education and ignorance, between light and darkness, a struggle of which we do not yet see the meaning or the end.

* I venture to ask Messrs. Macmillan to consider the claims of this scarce relic of our old educational system, and to put an illustration of a horn book in their beautiful edition of "Green's Short History of the English People," now in course of publication.

Irish Binding.

(AN OLD JOKE VERSIFIED.)

TEAGUE, a true honest soul as e'er trod Irish ground,
Once was sent by his master, some books to get bound;
Bibles, essays, and poems, and works of *virtu*,
To be deck'd in gilt letters, in scarlet and blue.

When the artisan eyed them, in terms of his trade,
"Some of these must be done in MOROCCO," he said,
"These bibles in TURKEY, and as for the rest
I think BASIL and RUSSIA will suit them best."

"Faith," says Teague, "hould your bother and outlandish
Sure and wont IRISH binding do well enough? [stuff.
Why these outlandish elves would you be after troubling?
Masther told me to get them all bound here in DUBLIN."

—From an old copy of "The Mirror" of sixty years ago.

A CONTEMPORARY has taken up the challenge thrown down by the Society of Authors, which claims acquaintance "with the methods and—in the case of fraudulent houses—the tricks of every publishing firm in the country." The reply says that publishers, in their turn, are not unaware of the tricks of fraudulent authors, but that they refrain from blazoning their wrongs, because to do so would be like writing themselves simpletons.