

teaching the child to read—that she had occupied this length of time with each of her elder children, and that it was a dreary and disheartening labor. I found that she commenced in the orthodox way with A, B, C, went on with a, b, ab; b a b, bab; b a b e, babe; and so on through all the established gradations of the time: (I am speaking of 25 years ago,) there was no syllabic spelling at that time, no phonic system, no “Fonetic Nuz,” no “Reading Disentangled”; none of the inventions of later days; for, Mrs. Williams, Dr. Kay Shuttleworth, the Pitmans, and Varty were alike unknown. There was nothing but alphabetic teaching with all its impediments, choking the progress as fast as progress was made.

I ventured to ask the lady I have referred to whether she would have the courage to forsake the old path altogether, and to try a new one. I found that she was ready to adopt any course I might suggest, and I desired her to begin with some interesting child's book in a large type—such as Barbauld's *Lessons*—not the Hymns, at first, as being too full of figurative language, and to read a lesson of a few lines to the child with the book open, and the child's attention fixed on it—pointing to each word as she read the sentences—thus giving the child an interest in the matter of the lesson; then to take a single line, and to read it deliberately, the child repeating each word after her—to repeat that line over and over again, till the child knew each word by its *appearance*; then to add another line, and another; and to go over the whole together, for a quarter of an hour; to resume the lesson a few hours after; going again over the old ground, but adding some new sentences, and thus to proceed day by day, attentively marking the progress she made.

I was zero met with the objection since so often raised, “How will the child learn to spell?” I desired that with the reading exercise *writing* should commence, and not the writing of letters merely, or parts of letters, but of *words*, and not words without meaning, but the names of objects, such as *pin, cat, nut, &c.*, and if accompanied with pictures of the objects, so much the better. I also pointed out how much the child would learn from analogy, even as to new words, which had in their formation syllables, prefixes, or terminations, similar to others already taught—adding that I relied on *writing*, copying first, and dictation afterwards, for teaching correct spelling. (We spell when we write, we do not spell when we read.) I then referred her to this extract from *Edgeworth's Practical Education*:—

As it is usually managed, it is a dreadful task indeed to learn, and if possible a more dreadful task to teach, to read; with the help of counters, and coaxing and gingerbread, or by dint of reiterated pain and terror, the names of the four and twenty letters of the alphabet are, perhaps, in the course of some weeks firmly fixed in the pupil's memory. So much the worse; all these names will disturb him, if he have common sense, and at every step must stop his progress. To begin with the vowels; each of these have different sounds, and consequently ought to have several names, or different signs to distinguish them in different circumstances. In the first lesson of the spelling book the child begins with a-b makes ab; b-a makes ba. The inference, if any general inference can be drawn from this lesson, is, that when a comes before b it has one sound, and after b it has another sound; but this is contradicted by and by, and it appears that a after b has various sounds, as in *ball, in but, in bare*. The letter i in *fire* is, as we call it in the alphabet, but in *fire* it is changed; in *pin* it is changed again; so that the child being ordered to affix to the same sign a variety of sounds, and names, and not knowing in what circumstances to obey, and in what to disregard the contradictory injunctions imposed upon him, he pronounces sounds at hazard, and adheres positively to the last ruled case, or maintains an apparently sullen, or truly philosophic and sceptical silence. Must e in *pen*, and e in *where*, and e in *her*, and e in *fear*, all be called e alike? The child is patted on the head for reading u as it ought to be pronounced in *future*; but if, remembering this encouragement, the pupil should venture to pronounce u in *gun* and *fun* in the same manner, he will inevitably be disgraced. Pain and shame impress precepts upon the mind, the child therefore is intent upon remembering the new sound as u in *fun*; but when he comes to *busy*, and *burial*, and *prudence*, his last precedent will lead him fatally astray, and he will again be called a *dunce*. O in the exclamation *Oh!* is happily called by its alphabetical name, but in *to-re* can hardly know it again, and in *morning* and *wonder* it has a third and fourth additional sound. The amphibious letter y, which is either a vowel or a consonant, has one sound in one character, and two sounds in the other character; as a consonant, it is pronounced as in *yesterday*; in *try*, it is sounded as i; in *any*, and in the termination of many other words, it is sounded like e. Must a child know all this by intuition, or must it be whipped into him? But he must know a great deal more before he can read the most common words; what length of time would we allow him for learning when e is sounded like k; and when like z? and how much longer time shall we add for learning when s shall be pronounced sh as in *sure*, or z as in *has*; the sound of which last letter z he cannot by any conjuration obtain from the name *zed*, the only name

by which he has been taught to call it? How much time shall we allow a patient tutor for teaching a docile pupil when g is to be sounded soft, and when hard. There are many carefully worded rules in the spelling books, specifying before what letters, and in what situations, g shall vary in sound, but unfortunately these rules are difficult to be learned by heart, and still more difficult to understand. These laws, however positive, are not found to be of universal application, or at least a child has not always wit or time to apply them upon the spur of the occasion. In coming to the words *good gentleman*, get an *ingenious grammar*, he may be puzzled by the nice distinctions he is to make in pronunciation in cases apparently similar; but he has not yet become acquainted with all the powers of this privileged letter; in company with h it assumes the character of f, as in *tough*: the next time he meets it perhaps in the same company, in the same place, and as nearly as possible in the same circumstances, as in the word *though*; but now g is to become a silent letter, and is to pass incognito, and the child would commit an unpardonable error if he claimed the incognito as his late acquaintance f. Still these are slight difficulties, a moment's reflection must convince us, that by teaching the common names of every consonant in the alphabet, we prepare a child for misery when he begins to spell or read. A consonant as sayeth the spelling book, is a letter which cannot be pronounced without a vowel before or after it; for this reason B is called *be*, and J, *cl*; but why the vowel should come first in the one case, or last in the second, we are not informed; nor are we told why the names of some letters have no resemblance whatever to their sounds, either with a vowel before or after them. Suppose that after having learned the alphabet, a child was to attempt to read the words, *Here is some apple pie*. He would pronounce the letters thus:—

“Ach e a r c i c s e s o e m e a p e p e l e p e w i c e.”

My next trial was of a different character to any I had hitherto directed or superintended. A friend at Portsea, who, anxious that the method should be tried with the convicts there, wrote to me for precise instructions. He supplied himself with lessons in large type, the words of which were visible at several yards distance, and operations were commenced with the lowest class of convicts—those unable to read—success attended the experiments; in a few weeks they were able to read any of the lessons set before them.

Although in these days we are much in advance of the work I have quoted, in many respects; there is much that is good yet to be drawn from it in others. But what was the result of the experiment of the lady with her child? *Four months* sufficed to enable the child to read any chapter in the New Testament.

The same course was recommended by me to other individuals, and followed with equal success. My next experience was personal, and took place several years after. My eldest child was approaching seven years of age, the time when, in my opinion, regular instruction in reading should commence: the age at which the mind unfolds rapidly and requires constant direction. My success gave me confidence, and I rejected all other methods of teaching reading; successive experiments confirmed me in the plan I adopted, and proved that a child may be taught to read better, and with less trouble to its teacher, and with less harass to itself by rejecting Alphabetic teaching altogether, and without having recourse to either the Syllabic or the Phonic methods.

About this time I met with the following confirmation of my experience. I will however candidly admit, that had I not felt an especial interest in the views here set forth, I might have regarded them as the “go-a-head” notions so freely exported from the West.

“If in any family, there be one individual who can read, that individual could without serious interruption or detriment to any ordinary occupation, teach all the other members of said family, old and young, to read also. If, in every settlement or vicinage, consisting of a dozen or twenty individuals or families, there be one who can read, that one could teach all the others in like manner to read. Let voluntary associations or classes, of from six to twenty persons (the members, for instance, of one or of several contiguous families,) be formed; and let them agree to meet twice or thrice a week for one or two hours, as their numbers or convenience may suggest,—to learn to read. And not many weeks or months will elapse before they will be all readers.

“Adults have been recently taught to read, in penitentiaries and elsewhere in a very short period—even within one or two weeks, in some cases—who previously did not know a letter. The chaplain or teacher opens his Bible—directs the eye of his pupil to the first verse of the first chapter—reads it distinctly—points out each word to the learner, and makes him repeat it—and so on to the end of the verse. In a few minutes, the pupil can read the verse backwards, or forwards. He now knows the words by their *phasis* or *appearance* in the book.

“Many children, have been taught to read in this manner, by individuals who had never heard of *M. Jacotot*,—and long before he was born. By him, indeed, the method with certain modifica-