

American Bibliographical Notes

THE NEW-ENGLAND PRIMER ENLARGED, 1727

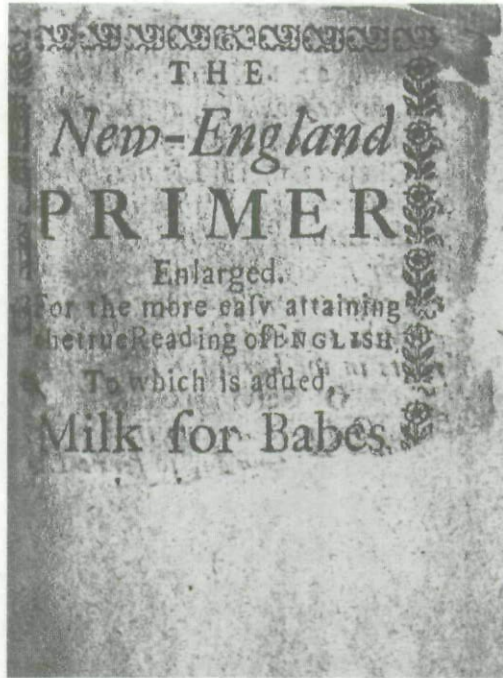
[Boston: Printed by S. Kneeland and T. Green, Sold by the Booksellers. 1727]

The title leaf is mutilated with damage to title and loss of imprint. Thirty-nine leaves of forty are present, wanting the first {blank?} leaf.

Until the reappearance of the American Antiquarian Society's copy of the *New-England Primer Enlarged*, the unique—1727—but imperfect copy (lacking leaves A1, most of B3, B4, and E8) located at the New York Public Library (NYPL) was the earliest known example of the once vital and ubiquitous *New England Primer*. It can be stated with certainty that the AAS acquisition is contemporaneous with the NYPL copy. Although the lower third of the title page of the AAS copy has been torn away, we are confident in this opinion because of the identical setting of the text of most of the title page and of the following eighteen leaves (through the recto of leaf C4). Because Boston printers of the 1720s would not have left standing printing types for any significant length of time (due to the shortage of type), the AAS edition must have been printed contemporaneously with that at the NYPL. Had the lower third of the title page of the AAS copy survived, it would indicate that, like the NYPL copy, Samuel Kneeland and Thomas Green had printed the little book in 1727. Both copies are gathered in eights, A–E⁸. The ornaments on the AAS title page are set identically with those of the

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The title page of the AAS copy after restoration. The lower third of the page is missing.

NYPL copy. So, too, are the settings of the texts of the AAS and NYPL title pages which precisely follow one another until they reach the end of the line, 'To which is added.' There 'Milk for Babes' is substituted in the AAS copy for 'The Assembly of Divines | Catechism' in the NYPL version. The settings of the texts follow one another through the pages bearing alphabets and books of the Bible, through the illustrated and lurid story of John Rogers who was burned at the stake by Roman Catholic Inquisitors.

The *New England Primer* was first issued in London and was reprinted in Boston as early as 1687-1690? But, as we have indi-

cated, no copy exists of any American edition of the primer dated prior to the two 1727 editions now located at AAS and NYPL. Those earlier primers numbered in the thousands. Charles F. Heartman, who compiled the bibliography of American editions of the *New England Primer*, estimated that between 1749 and 1766 more than 39,000 copies of the primer were issued by American printers. Indeed, a bill dated July 11, 1727, from Samuel Kneeland and Timothy Green has been found at AAS among the papers of Daniel Henchman (1689-1761), the most important Boston bookseller of his generation. Kneeland & Green charged Henchman £10-00-00 'To Printing Four Thousand Primers.' It is tempting to believe that this bill pertains directly to the two copies located at AAS and NYPL. It is astonishing to realize that only four copies survive from the 1730s. A single copy dated 1735 is located at the Huntington Library; two dated copies of 1737 survive; and the Huntington has a 1738 edition. At one time, the Society's earliest *New England Primer* dated from 1750, but in 1970 AAS obtained the unique copy of yet another departure in primers. Its title is *The American Primer Enlarged*, printed in 1740 in Philadelphia by Andrew Bradford. *The American Primer* contains texts intended to appeal to the parents of children who did *not* live in New England.

As fascinating as priority and scarcity may be to bibliophiles, however, the importance of the two 1727 *New England Primers* lies in their differences. At the verso of leaf C₄ the texts diverge. There begins, in the NYPL copy, 'The Shorter Catechism Agreed upon by the Reverend Assembly of Divines at Westminster,' continuing through leaf E₇, the final leaf present. In the AAS copy we find, beginning at C₄^v, a selection of prayers, psalms, secular information, religious advice, and at C₇^r 'Spiritual Milk for Boston Babes. Drawn out the Breasts of Both Testaments, for their Souls Nourishment. By John Cotton.' This Puritan catechism, written by the famous Boston minister, is followed by readings from the Gospels and other matter until the

primer concludes on E8^v, with a 'portrait' of the British monarch. Thus, the newly acquired version of *The New-England Primer Enlarged* constitutes a departure from what went before. Here we find a new emphasis—a Boston cast—has been placed upon the text of the *New England Primer* by the inclusion of a modicum of non-religious information and, most importantly, a catechism specifically intended for New England's Puritan children. It differs significantly, then from the pattern established by its predecessors which contain the Presbyterian catechism.

The New-England Primer Enlarged constitutes an icon in the history of American culture and printing. This was recognized by the James J. Colt Foundation, Edward C. Johnson 3rd, Paul Mellon, Justin G. Schiller, Donald Oresman, Stephen D. Weissman, Earl E. Bakken, and John E. Woolsey, Jr., in their joint gift making possible this acquisition. It becomes an essential part of the collections of the American Antiquarian Society's incomparable holdings of materials influential in the development of American life, of books intended to be read by American children, and in the history of American printing.

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