

from *The New England Primer* (c. 1683)

[THE ALPHABET]

In Adam's fall
We sinned all.

Thy life to mend,
This Book¹ attend.

The Cat doth play,
And after slay.

A Dog will bite
A thief at night.

An Eagle's flight
Is out of sight.

The idle Fool
Is whipped at school.

As runs the Glass,²
Man's life doth pass.

My Book and Heart
Shall never part.

Job³ feels the rod,
Yet blesses God.

Our King the good
No man of blood.⁴

The Lion bold
the Lamb doth hold.

The Moon gives light
In time of night.

Nightingales sing.
In time of spring.

The royal Oak, it was the tree
That saved his royal majesty.⁵

Peter denies
His Lord, and cries.⁶

Queen Esther comes in royal state
To save the Jews from dismal fate.⁷

Rachel doth mourn
For her first-born.⁸

Samuel anoints
Whom God appoints.⁹

Time cuts down all,
Both great and small.

Uriah's beauteous wife
Made David seek his life.¹⁰

Whales in the sea,
God's voice obey.

Xerxes the great did die¹¹
And so must you and I.

Youth forward slips,
Death soonest nips.

Zaccheus he
Did climb the tree
His Lord to see.¹²

⁴Probably the Reverend John Sherman, minister of Watertown.

¹The Bible.

²Hourglass, containing sand flowing from one half to the other.

³Tried with a series of misfortunes, the righteous Job accepts God's will (Job 1:21).

⁴Bloodshed or hot temper.

⁵Charles II, after his defeat by Cromwell at Worcester in 1649, was hidden in the Royal Oak at Boscobel in order to effect his escape and flight to France.

⁶Matthew 26:75: "And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly."

⁷Esther was an orphaned Jewish girl raised in Persia. Because of her beauty she was chosen to be the consort of the Persian King Ahasuerus. When the king's prime minister, finding the Jews unsubmitive, planned to annihilate them, Esther risked her life by interceding for her people (Esther 8:1-8).

⁸Rachel was looked upon as the mother of the tribes of Israel. Jeremiah 31:15: "Thus saith the Lord; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not."

⁹Following the Lord's will, Samuel first anointed Saul to succeed him as king; but then he became displeased with Saul's actions and, again following the choice of the Lord, anointed David king in place of Saul (1 Samuel 15, 16).

¹⁰A loyal soldier in David's army, Uriah was the husband of Bathsheba, beloved by David. David plotted Uriah's death in order to possess Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11, 12).

¹¹Xerxes the Great (c. 519-465 B.C.), King of Persia (r. 486-465 B.C.), was victorious in war with the Greeks, especially in bridging the Hellespont and in the battle at Thermopylae (480 B.C.), but later defeated.

¹²Zaccheus was a tax collector in Jericho hated by his compatriots. He was short in stature and when Jesus came to Jericho, Zaccheus had to climb a tree to see him. Jesus ate with Zaccheus and brought about his reform (Luke 19).