



**Unique copy of popular children's book in SC&A**

SPEC JUV.709:2

*The pleasing instructor or entertaining moralist consisting of select essays, relations, visions, and allegories ... to which are prefixed New thoughts on education.*

*The Pleasing Instructor*, by the progressive female educationist Mrs. Thomas Slack, was first published in 1756 and was in print well into the 19th century.

The British Library has many copies, but realised that this Liverpool copy is unique: <http://estc.bl.uk/T200724>

The author wrote under the name 'Anne Fisher' and chose suitable material from such magazines as the *Guardian*, *Tatler*, and *Spectator*, adding anonymous pieces, which she may have written herself.

'Anne Fisher' (1719-1778) had married in 1751 the Newcastle printer, Thomas Slack, and her immensely popular books made

a huge contribution to the success of the business. *The Pleasing Instructor* appeared in numerous editions: 'insomuch that it has now acquired a Place in almost every Parlour Window.'

It was also widely imitated and pirated: the four copperplate illustrations in this edition were added so that 'the Public may distinguish this Book from a Piracy of it now abroad'.

The ATHEIST and ACORN.

**M**ethinks the World seems oddly made,  
And every Thing amiss,  
A dull complaining Atheist said,  
As stretch'd he lay beneath a Shade,  
And insanced in this.

Behold, quoth he, that mighty Thing,  
A Pumpkin large and round,  
Is held but by a little String  
Which upwards cannot make it Spring,  
Nor bear it from the Ground.

While on this Oak an Acorn small,  
So disproportion'd grows;  
That whosoever surveys this all,  
This universal casual Fall,  
Its ill Contrivance knows.

By better Judgment would have hung  
The Pumpkin on the Tree;  
and left the Acorn slightly strung  
Among things that on the Surface sprung,  
And weak and feeble be.

No more the Cavalier could say,  
No further Faults decry;  
For upwards grazing as he lay,  
An Acorn, loosen'd from its Spray,  
Fell down upon his Eye.

The wounded Part with Tears ran o'er,  
As punish'd for the Sin:  
Fool! had that Bough a Pumpkin bore,  
Thy Whimnies must have work'd no more,  
Nor Skull have kept 'em in.

A CON-

The Preface comments that *The Pleasing Instructor* is intended “to exhibit a connected Plan of Morality for the Instruction of the Youth of both Sexes” and the author is particularly concerned with the defects in the education of young women: ‘I do not mean to recommend READING at the expence of SEWING , but would only make a *principle* of the former’.

The author’s ‘Thoughts on Education’ in this edition are preceded by the advertisement for New Books (one of this book’s unique points) which includes two more schoolbooks by ‘Anne Fisher.’

‘The Atheist and Acorn’ is one of the last pieces in the book, collected from the *Gentleman’s Magazine*. It is a light-hearted example of its moral tone, and may reflect the popular image of Newton discovering the law of gravity under his apple tree, which did not, fortunately, bear pumpkins.

## References:

University of Liverpool , Special Collections & Archives website: <http://sca.lib.liv.ac.uk/collections/index.html>

Special Collections & Archives Children’s Collection: <http://sca.lib.liv.ac.uk/collections/collections/children/index.html>

See also Oxford Dictionary of National Biography article: Anne Fisher (1719–1778): doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/45847