

# **THE ORIGINAL AMERICAN MOTHER GOOSE**

**by Alice Whitson Norton**

FOR more than two centuries the children of America and the world have been enjoying the rhymes found in a volume of jingles labeled Mother Goose. But even today the identity of the real author is unsettled.

For a long time people said "Mother Goose" was a nom de plume, maybe even a myth. Nobody was ever known by such a name. But by-and-by someone took issue, and today it is generally conceded that Mother Goose was a real woman who lived in the city of Boston in long-ago colonial days, and made up the jingles of "Mary's Little Lamb," "Tom, Tom the Piper's Son," and all the other delightful verses which children love, for the benefit of her own small grandson.

SARAH CATHERINE MARTIN OF LOCKINGE, BERKSHIRE, ENGLAND, 1768-1826, AUTHOR AND LIMNER OF "OLD MOTHER HUBBARD" 1804

In the registrar's office of the city of Boston is a memorandum of the marriage of Thomas Fleet and Elizabeth Goose, performed by the Reverend Cotton Mather, June 8, 1715. It was the child of this couple, many believe today, that first heard the rhymes which were destined to become familiar to all children. And just as they were sung to Baby Fleet by the grandmother on the Goose side of the house, they have come down to the present generation.

To Thomas Fleet, the father of Baby Fleet-a very busy man, burdened, probably by the responsibilities of maintaining a home and rearing a family, and who operated a printing shop in Pudding Lane, changed long since to Devonshire Street-we are indebted for the printing of the old classics. The story goes that Thomas Fleet had little patience with the nonsensical rhymes that his wife's mother sang to his child. They irritated him when he went home for his lunch; they disturbed his evening when he felt the need of quiet and rest behind the four walls of his own home. He considered the verses Grandmother Goose crooned to his child as simple and far too ridiculous for a child's ears, and this statement he often repeated.

Nevertheless, Grandmother Goose continued to make up and sing the merry jingles which never failed to bring a smile to her grandchild's face, as well as to any other child's face that happened to hear one of them. Then one day, having been especially bored by the silly jingles his own child was repeating, the thought entered Thomas Fleet's brain that he might make a few extra dollars by publishing a group of the silly creations in a pamphlet.

Thus in the year of 1719, a small volume of Mother Goose jingles, behind a cover page illustration of a big, soft-feathered goose with a wide-open mouth and a long neck, made its appearance on the market. The volume was marked to sell at two coppers

each-and to the man's great surprise it immediately found favor among the bookminded colonists, and from the appearance of the first edition, right down through the years, these little jingles which Mr. Fleet thought so distasteful, have continued to be a steady seller.

Strange to say, there is, even to this day, some doubt concerning the true identity of the real author. On a slab above an ancient grave in the Granary.

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