



BREWER'S

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DICTIONARY OF PHRASE  
AND FABLE

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Centenary Edition

REVISED BY  
IVOR H. EVANS

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## EDITOR'S PREFACE

Of the forty or so publications by Dr. Ebenezer Cobham Brewer, his *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, still in the hands of its original publishers, has outlived all the others. That this somewhat miscellaneous compilation has continued in active circulation for a century is sufficient testimony of its proven usefulness and it is seldom found at the second-hand booksellers'. Although initially regarded as a rather doubtful commercial venture, it has long established itself as an authoritative companion for those with literary interests and catholic tastes. Biographical information on the author, and a list of Dr. Brewer's other writings, will be found in the memoir kindly contributed by his grandson, Captain P. M. C. Hayman; it remains for me to make some brief remarks on the book itself and to explain what changes have been effected in this centenary edition.

Dr. Brewer's acquaintance with an astonishingly wide range of subjects and authors becomes apparent the more one delves into the book, and his familiarity with the Bible, Lemprière's *Classical Dictionary*, the works of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton and Scott, Percy's *Reliques* and Butler's *Hudibras*, stand out. Perhaps his second range of favourite works were those of Thomson, Pope, Dryden, Byron, Thackeray, Dickens, and Tennyson, but the total range of his gleanings extends over many fields, from the writings of ancient authors to those of the Victorians.

In the earlier editions, the author referred to his dictionary as an "alms-basket of words" and the title page described it as a "Dictionary of Phrase and Fable giving the Derivation, Source, or Origin of Common Phrases, Allusions, and Words that have a Tale to Tell". Since his death in 1897, successive editors have modified the text, deleted the obsolete or more trifling entries and added new material, especially contemporary phrase. Nevertheless the core of the book is still essentially and substantially Brewer's, a fact which emphasises the original soundness of his selection.

The present edition is based on that of 1963, but I have sought to return more closely to Dr. Brewer's original conception by discarding entries (e.g. *Artesian Wells*, *China Clay*, *Copyright*, *Exchange Equalisation Fund*, *Lacrosse*, *Liqueur*, *Rack and Pinion Railway*, *Rhodes Scholarships*, etc.) which seemed to have little claim to be in a dictionary of "Phrase and Fable". Words which have no particular "tale to tell" have also been deleted, as well as numerous words and technical expressions, etc., for an explanation of which the average reader would naturally turn to the household dictionary, general encyclopaedia, or specialized reference book rather than to "Brewer". There has also

been certain re-arrangement of sub-entries. Repetition has been largely eliminated by comprehensive cross-referencing, which may also help those inclined to browse; the text has been carefully checked for accuracy of content and reference, and also extensively re-written to take account of more recent scholarship. I have aimed at clarity and conciseness and to give origins and explanations wherever I have been able, but nothing has been changed merely for the sake of giving it a "new look". Comparison of such present entries as *Madoc*, *Miching*, *Hungry Forties*, *Parts of Speech*, *The Wars of the Roses* (under *Rose*), *Tich*, with their predecessors will give those interested some idea of the kinds of alteration effected.

In spite of deletions and the endeavour to avoid prolixity, the book is considerably larger than the previous edition, since much new material has been added, a good deal of this being recent and current phrase (e.g. *Brain Drain*, *Do-it-yourself*, *Golden Handshake*, *Four-letter Words*, *Mods and Rockers*, *Oxbridge*, *Redbrick*, *South Bank Religion*, etc.), although there are very many which do not fall into this category, (e.g. *Hobbit*, *Jersey Lily*, *Kiss me Hardy*, *Mabinogion*, *Mari Lwyd*, *Milner's Kindergarten*, *Moody and Sankey*, *Rasputin*, *Rowley*, *Sanctuary*, *Yellow Book*, etc.). Somewhat greater attention than in the past has been given to Irish and Welsh "fable" and to American and Commonwealth expressions. Furthermore, I have not been pedantically consistent in keeping to my terms of reference and have included various "oddities" in accordance with the "Brewer" tradition.

The task of revision has been arduous and has occupied most of my "spare time" since the end of 1964. This has involved considerable neglect of my family for whose forbearance and help I must be grateful. Especial thanks must go to Margaret C. Quarterman for her enthusiastic spadework on a very large number of new entries, also to John C. Woods for his revision of the entry on Regimental and Divisional Nicknames (British Army), and to those numerous friends and correspondents who have given me the benefit of their specialized knowledge on particular points. Furthermore, I must acknowledge the courtesy and consideration extended to me by the publishers, and in particular thank Dr. Desmond Flower for the interest he has shown and for a number of helpful suggestions.

In conclusion, it must be emphasised that mine is the responsibility for any errors or inconsistencies that may remain, but it is earnestly hoped that critics will not find this Centenary Edition unworthy of its predecessors.

I. H. E.

*East Wheal Russell*  
October, 1969.

## E. COBHAM BREWER LL.D.

A brief memoir by his grandson

Captain P. M. C. Hayman, J.P.

It is inevitable that the passage of time, which has made the Brewer of the dictionary a household name among the educated, has obscured Brewer the man. In this brief memoir, prepared for the centenary edition of my grandfather's *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, I have therefore sought to redress the balance and to satisfy the reader's natural curiosity as to the character of the man who originally compiled this famous reference book.

Ebenezer Cobham Brewer was born on 2 May, 1810, the second of the four surviving sons of John Sherren Brewer by his second wife Elizabeth, daughter of Robert Kitton of Barton Hall, Norwich. In later life, Dr. Brewer, as I shall now call him, frequently stated that he was born at London, but an entry in a recently-discovered Bible shows that he was in fact born at Calvert Street, Norwich and baptised "Ebenezer" at Cambridge. He did not, however, use his baptismal name, always signing himself "E. Cobham Brewer". His father had given him this second name probably to mark the link between this branch of the Brewer family and the Cobhams, through the connection of one of his ancestors with the family of Sir John Oldcastle, the adherent of John Wyclif, martyred for his religious beliefs in 1417.

The family was Kentish and Dr. Brewer's father was born at Dartford. An imprudent first marriage ended his Oxford career without a degree, but the scholarship which enabled him to conduct a school at Norwich with success and repute was passed on to the four sons of his second marriage, each of whom was distinguished in his way. Dr. Brewer's eldest brother, another John Sherren Brewer, was Professor of English Literature and Modern History at King's College, London, and for many years engaged in the invaluable work of calendaring the State Papers relating to the reign of Henry VIII in the Public Record Office; while of the two younger, William, a doctor, became intimately concerned with London local government and was a Member of Parliament for Colchester, and Robert Kitton gave up the promise of a brilliant musical career to become a Baptist minister.

Dr. Brewer was educated privately and went up to Trinity Hall, Cambridge, in 1832. As an undergraduate he won many prizes and he obtained First Class Honours when he graduated in Civil Laws in 1836. In 1848 he proceeded LL.D., but in the meantime he had taken orders, being ordained deacon in 1836, and priest in 1838.

However, he never held a cure, and would seem to have sought ordination,

like so many others, as a further qualification for a scholastic career. On leaving the University he assisted his father at his boarding-school, Mile End House, Norwich, and succeeded the latter as headmaster, on his retirement. The school was later known as King's College School, Norwich, and no doubt the connection it maintained in more than name with King's College, London, was due to Dr. Brewer's brother, John Sherren Brewer, then lecturer in Classical Literature at King's.

It was natural, even then, that Dr. Brewer's thoughts should turn to literature, since he was justly proud of the fact that he kept himself at the University entirely by his pen, never once calling upon his parents for assistance, and having a balance of £30 over, out of which he bought his robes—a feat which can have been equalled by few other Cambridge undergraduates before or since!

His earlier works were written while headmaster of his Norwich school, and it was perhaps their success which impelled him to leave teaching for authorship. From the 1850s, he was to devote himself to science and literature and, until his marriage (5 July, 1856) with Ellen Mary, eldest daughter of the Reverend Francis Tebbutt of Hove, he travelled extensively on the Continent and lived for some years in Paris. Here he became something of a lion in society and had his entrée to the Court of Napoleon III. He became well acquainted with the Emperor, for whom he retained a lasting admiration, having known the chronic state of unrest in France before the advent of the Second Empire, and plaster busts of the Emperor and Empress always stood on the mantelpiece in his room.

His nephew H. W. Brewer, the architectural artist, has an amusing story of him at this period:

I had the pleasure of spending some time with my uncle, Dr. Cobham Brewer, in Paris. He is a most genial and popular man, but was supposed by many people to be a kind of Cagliostro. He was at that time unmarried and lived in chambers where he had an excellent reference library—about a thousand volumes. His housekeeper was immensely proud of her lodger, but firmly believed him to be a kind of wizard and we found that when he was away from Paris, as he frequently was for short periods, she used to exhibit his rooms and used to declare that he had written all the books which were on the shelves of his library. There was a little kitchen where I believe he never did anything but cook his breakfast, for he was a wonderfully good hand at cooking and turned out the best omelette I have ever eaten. This little room used to be shown as the place where he manufactured lightning. I told Dr. Brewer what I had heard and he laughed at it but said, "Of course this must be put a stop to. I will soon settle Madame . . .!" So he sent for her and she came into the room. The Doctor put on his most severe air and said to her: "Madame, how dare you exhibit my rooms when I am from home?" The poor woman was so frightened that she fell down on her knees and implored forgiveness. "Of

course," she said, "I ought to have known that you can see everything that goes on while you are away."

The result of this residence in France was that he so completely mastered the language that, when his *Guide to Science* was translated into French, he performed the task himself. It was indeed a remarkable undertaking, rendered the more so by the fact that the book was not just a translation, but virtually a new book on the same lines, every idiom, phrase and proverb being transfused and not translated, and every custom not common to France being wholly changed into something familiar. As *La Clef de la Science* it first appeared in 1854 and such was its success that the Emperor Napoleon III expressed a desire to have an edition prepared for the use of the Prince Imperial. This appears to have been the fifth French edition, "Dedicated by Authority" to the Emperor.

This *Guide to Science* was the first (and a very successful first) of a long series of popular educational works. Published about 1840, the *Guide* had not only sold over half-a-million copies by the time of its author's death in 1897, but had, in addition, been translated into French, German, Italian, Spanish, Swedish, Greek and Welsh. But Dr. Brewer's literary life was so busy, his publications so numerous, that it would overload this short memoir to try to discuss even some of them. I have therefore appended a chronological list of his books, to which I have added, when known to me, a note of the numbers of editions through which they went, from which the reader can see both the range and the popularity of his writings in their own day. This list however does not include every single thing that Dr. Brewer wrote and published. For example, I have in my possession the draft of what he describes as a "scaling rhyme" on the opening of the Crystal Palace, which was published in 1851, and sold at 1/-, illustrated. I have also the printed proofs of a long, detailed *Story of the Great French Exhibition 1867*, from which I see under his name as author, *The Story of the Atlantic Cable*, published the year previously. I have also a vast number of MSS in his very beautiful handwriting on every conceivable subject, including poems for young children.

Two works, however, have outlived the others — one better-known now than when it was first published. Chatto & Windus first issued *The Reader's Handbook* in 1880 and Dr. Brewer was actually revising a later edition of it at the time of his death. This revision was completed by my mother, his eldest daughter, Mrs. Hayman, whose work was described by the critics as 'being in a spirit and with an industry indistinguishable from that of her father Dr. Brewer.' It was last published in 1940.

In 1870, the *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* had appeared and in this, the Centenary Edition, a few words about its history may not be inappropriate.

It was in 1864 that Dr. Brewer offered Messrs. Cassell, Petter & Galpin the manuscript of what was to prove one of the most famous books which he was to write. It was his boyhood habit of notetaking, which he continued all his life, that he attributed the success of both this and *The Reader's*



*Handbook*. In the middle of the room which later in life he used as a study at Edwinstowe Vicarage, there was a long wooden box arrangement. The front was open and divided into pigeon-holes, lettered from A to Z, in which were the slips of paper on which were written the notes and references he made and continued to make daily. This was the genesis of the *Dictionary*, as shown in the Author's copy of the 36th Edition. There Dr. Brewer wrote a note in ink giving the "History of this Dictionary".

He first refers to the extraordinary success of the *Guide to Science*, and then continues, "the popularity of this book brought me in a large number of questions on all imaginary matters. I kept these questions and their answers till they grew into a large book, when I sorted them and made the nucleus of the *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*. I consulted the Editor of *The Despatch*, to whom I was well known, but it was his opinion that the book would have no sale as it would be wholly impossible to exhaust the subject."

Dr. Brewer then states that, not discouraged, he offered the manuscript to Messrs. Cassell, Petter & Galpin who, though doubtful whether the book would pay the expense of printing, agreed to risk the venture. The book was published in 1870 and proved to be a great success, edition following edition. "When in 1894," the note continues, "the sale had exceeded 100,000 copies, the new firm\* asked me what I would charge for revising the book and adding such new matter as I had at hand. I said £250, to which they agreed, and when the book was completed, the firm sent me a gratuity of 50 guineas. I went carefully over the old matter which I thought proper to retain and added some 400 pages of new matter. The sale of the new 'Enlarged Edition', issued in fifteen pamphlets, far exceeded our utmost expectations."

Meanwhile, and probably in the early 1860s, he became editor-in-chief to Cassell, Petter, Galpin & Co. There is no surviving record of the dates during which he held this appointment, but he himself stated that he remained with Messrs. Cassell's for a number of years, editing the vast number of books they published and playing a prominent part in the affairs of this important firm. Subsequently he retained a room on the premises of the company where he was engaged in writing his various educational books for the young. Such was his activity, that it is not in the least surprising that he had a serious breakdown in health, which obliged him to give up his position with Cassell's and to leave London for the country. He took a house at Lavant, near Chichester in Sussex, and lived there for many years, adding for a time to his literary activities the editorship of the now long defunct *Morning Herald*, a post which he held jointly with his elder brother, Professor John Sherren Brewer.

Following the death of his wife at Lavant in 1878, Dr. Brewer came to

\*In 1883, William Petter retired and the style of the "old" firm of Cassell, Petter, Galpin & Company was changed to the name it still bears, Cassell & Company Limited.

live with his eldest daughter, my mother. She had married the Reverend (later Canon) Henry Telford Hayman, Vicar of Edwinstowe in Nottinghamshire, and I should like to conclude with a few personal memories of my grandfather.

Dr. Brewer must have been nearly eighty years of age when I was old enough to remember him at the Vicarage. He had an upstairs room furnished as a bed-sitting-room, for he used to work far into the night, often until three or four in the morning. He always declared that he did his best work then—but he was always down to breakfast dead on time at nine o'clock.

The walls of this room were papered with a plain white paper, upon which he used to write in pencil stray memoranda and the names of any particularly interesting visitors and the dates on which they came to see him. These names included that of the Duchess of Portland, then one of the most beautiful women in the country. She insisted on going upstairs to my grandfather's own room and carried on a long conversation with him, sitting on his bed, a highly informal proceeding in those days, which particularly pleased the old gentleman!

He had a wonderful way with children and would put aside whatever he was doing to amuse the children of the house before they went to bed. He was a great hand at cutting out, drawing, telling stories, showing his "treasures" which he had collected in various countries and relating his experiences in France and at the Court of Napoleon III and his Empress. But it was his sense of humour, which he could adapt to the childish mind, which made Dr. Brewer in his old age such a very delightful companion to the youngest of his grandchildren.

He was also quite fearless. On one occasion the Vicarage odd-job-man—not remarkable for either intelligence or courage—came up to the house to announce that a rough-looking man was asleep in the stable. Before my father, a county cricketer and a noted sportsman, could move, Dr. Brewer had seized a stick and, when the Vicar arrived at the stable, he found the old gentleman belabouring the trespasser, a hulking tramp, and exclaiming, "Be off, you scoundrel!" This onslaught was too much for the tramp, who made off as hard as he could go.

At one time he had played a good deal of chess, and there was a small round table in his room marked out as a chess board which he himself had made, but, although he taught my elder brother the moves, it is doubtful if he could have found anyone at Edwinstowe capable of giving him a serious game.

An acquaintance of Dr. Brewer's latter years gives us the following picture of him—"To the last he spent hours in study and reading, while his favourite recreation seemed to be gardening, an occupation to which he devoted himself in all weathers. . . . There was always a bright cheery welcome in the cosy drawing-room into which one was shown, and soon would appear the slight, stooping figure of an old man, with a long grey venerable beard and

bushy eyebrows, under which large, grey-blue eyes glanced still keenly out on the world on which they had looked for eighty-six years. He walked rather slowly, but other signs of age there were practically none, and once ensconced in his own particular chair he was ready to chat on any subject under the sun which the visitor chose. I can safely say that I never parted from him without learning something new or interesting."

He died on 6 March, 1897, at Edwinstowe Vicarage, in his eighty-seventh year, and it was at Edwinstowe that he was buried.

P.M.C.H.

*Cheltenham*

1969

*Chronological List of Books Written or Edited by Dr. E. Cobham Brewer*

c. 1841	A Guide to Science <i>The exact date of first publication is not known, although Brewer himself said 1840. A "Second Edition" was published in 1848 and by 1905 the book had gone through forty-seven editions and sold 319,000 copies in English alone</i>	JARROLD
1842	School Recitations	JARROLD
1842	Poetical Chronology <i>Second Edition 1853</i>	LONGMANS JARROLD
1844	A New Set of Arithmetical and Commercial Tables <i>At least twenty editions</i>	JARROLD
c. 1847	An Entire New System of Book-keeping by single-entry <i>At least thirteen editions</i>	JARROLD
1847	Allison's Guide to English History and Biography <i>Dr. Brewer revised this, the sixth edition, and his revision went through a further sixty editions</i>	JARROLD
c. 1850	A Guide to English Composition <i>A Second Edition was published in 1853</i>	LONGMANS
1853	A Guide to Roman History <i>Twenty-four editions</i>	JARROLD
1853	An Entire New System of Book-keeping by double-entry <i>At least six editions</i>	JARROLD
1854	Sound and Its Phenomena	LONGMANS
1858	A Guide to the Mythology, History and Literature of Ancient Greece <i>Fourteen editions</i>	JARROLD
1858/1860	A Guide to Scripture History (Two Parts, Old and New Testaments) <i>Twenty-four editions</i>	JARROLD
1859	Appendix to Dr. Brewer's Guide to Science, to which is added Poisons and Accidents, their antidotes and remedies <i>A third edition was published in this year. Date of first publication not known</i>	JARROLD

# Chronological List of Books

1860	Theology in Science <i>At least seven editions</i>	JARROLD
1863	The Political, Social and Literary History of France <i>At least ten editions</i>	JARROLD
1864	My First Book of Bible History	CASELL
	My First Book of Geography	CASELL
	My First Book of the History of England	CASELL
	My First Book of Reading and Spelling	CASELL
	My First Book of Science	CASELL
	My First Book of Common Things	CASELL
	The Young Tutor	CASELL
1868	My First Book of Astronomy	CASELL
	My First Book of Chemistry	CASELL
	My First Book of Facts and Discoveries	CASELL
	My First Book of French History	CASELL
	My First Book of Grecian History	CASELL
	My First Book of the History of Rome	CASELL
1870	<b>A Dictionary of Phrase and Fable</b> Great Central Points of Medieval and Modern History selected from the Poetical Chronology	CASELL
1874	A Guide to Christian Evidences <i>At least three editions</i> The Pathway through the Bible and Gospel History <i>At least five editions</i>	LONGMANS JARROLD JARROLD
1877	Errors of Speech and Spelling (reissued 1882)	JARROLD
1880	The Reader's Handbook <i>At least six editions</i> Rules for English Spelling	CHATTO AND WINDUS JARROLD
1881	The Political, Social and Literary History of Germany The Smaller History of Germany	DE LA RUE DE LA RUE
1882	An Etymological and Pronouncing Dictionary of Difficult Words Appendices to the Reader's Handbook <i>At least seven editions</i>	WARD, LOCK CHATTO AND WINDUS
1884	A Dictionary of Miracles  Authors and their Works	CHATTO AND WINDUS CHATTO AND WINDUS
1891	The Historic Notebook Constance Naden and Hylo-Idealism	SMITH, ELDER BICKERS

# KEY TO PRONUNCIATION

## VOWELS

a	as in far (far).	o	as in not (not).
ă	„ fat (făt).	ô	„ no (nô).
â	„ fate (fât).	ô	„ north (nôrth).
aw	„ fall (fawl).	oo	„ food (food).
â	„ fair (fâr).		
e	„ bell (bel).	u	„ bull (bul).
ě	„ her (hěr).	û	„ sun (sûn).
ē	„ beef (bēf).	û	„ muse (mûz).
i	„ bit (bit).	ou	„ bout (bout).
î	„ bite (bît).	oi	„ join (join).

A dot placed over a, e, o, or u (â, ě, ô, û) signifies that the vowel has an obscure, indeterminate, or slurred sound, as in:—

advice (ăd-vîś), current (kûr' ěnt), notion (nô' shôn).

y when used as a vowel is rendered by i as in Polycrates (pol i' krâ tēz).

## CONSONANTS

b, d, f, h (see the combinations below), k, l, m, n, p, r, t, v, w, x, z, and y when used as a consonant, have their usual values.

c (except in the combinations *ch* and *ch*) is not used, the hard c being rendered by k as in cachet (kăsh' â), and the soft c by s as in Cinderella (sin děr rel' â).

q is not used and is rendered by k as in quey (kwă).

s is used only for the sibilant s, as in toast (tôst); the sonant s is rendered as z, as in toes (tôz).

x is not used and is rendered by z or ks as in Xerxes (zěrks' ěz).

ch is rendered by k when thus pronounced, as in Acheron (ăk' er on), and by sh in words of French origin as in panache (păn âsh).

ph is rendered by f as in Pharaoh (fâr' ô).

ch	as in church (chěrch).	hw	as in white (hwit).
ch	„ loch (loch).	sh	„ shawl (shawl).
		zh	„ measure (mezĥ' ūr).
g	„ get (get).	th	„ thin (thin).
j	„ join (join).	th	„ thine (th in).

The soft g is rendered by j as in gin (jin) and in words of French origin by zh as in gendarme (zhon' darm). J is also rendered by zh in words of French origin as in jeunesse (zhěr nes').

The accent (') follows the syllable to be stressed.

## ABBREVIATIONS

Arab.	Arabic	M.E.	Middle English
Austr.	Australian	Med. Lat.	Mediæval Latin
<i>cp.</i>	compare	Mod. Fr.	Modern French
Dan.	Danish	O.E.	Old English
Dut.	Dutch	O.Fr.	Old French
<i>e.g.</i>	<i>exempli gratia</i> (for example)	O.H.Ger.	Old High German
Fr.	French	O. Slav.	Old Slavonic
Gael.	Gaelic	Pers.	Persian
Ger.	German	Port.	Portuguese
Gr.	Greek	<i>q.v.</i>	<i>quod vide</i> (which see)
Heb.	Hebrew	Russ.	Russian
Hind.	Hindustani	Sans.	Sanskrit
Icel.	Icelandic	Scot.	Scottish
Ital.	Italian	Sp.	Spanish
Jap.	Japanese	Swed.	Swedish
Lat.	Latin	Turk.	Turkish
		<i>viz.</i>	<i>videlicet</i> (namely)

## CROSS-REFERENCES

These are indicated in the text by the use of SMALL CAPITALS unless *q.v.* is used.

## A

**A.** This letter is modified from the Egyptian hieroglyph representing the eagle. The Phœnician (Hebrew) symbol was \* (*aleph*=an ox), doubtfully assumed to represent an ox-head. The Greek A (*alpha*) was the symbol of a bad AUGURY in the sacrifices. *See also* SCARLET LETTER.

**A** in logic denotes a universal affirmative.

**A1** means first-rate—the very best. In *Lloyd's Register of British and Foreign Shipping* the state of a ship's hull is designated by *letters* and that of the anchors, cables, etc. by *figures*. Thus A1 is a mark of the first class.

**A from a windmill, Not to know.** To be very obtuse or ignorant. Possibly suggested by the similarity between the shape of a capital A and that of a distant tower windmill. Current in popular speech until the late 19th century.

**Aalu, or Aaru.** In ancient Egyptian religion the fields of Aalu, where food was grown for the dead to supplement the votive offerings of their descendants, correspond roughly with the Elysian fields of Greek mythology.

**Aaron** (âr'on). The patriarch of the Jewish priesthood (*Exod.* xxviii), possibly connected with *haaron*, "the ark".

**Aaron's Beard.** The popular name of many wild plants, including Great St. John's Wort (Rose of Sharon), the Ivy-leaved Toadflax, Meadowsweet, *Saxifrage sarmentosa*, etc. The reference is to *Ps.* cxxxiii, 2.

**Aaron's Rod.** The name given (with reference to *Num.* xvii, 8) to various flowering plants including Golden Rod and Great Mullein. Also a name for the DIVINING ROD.

**Aaron's serpent.** Something so powerful as to swallow up minor powers (*Exod.* vii, 10-12). Thus Prussia was the Aaron's serpent that swallowed up the lesser German States between 1866 and 1870.

**Aaru.** *See* AALU.

**Aarvak.** *See* HORSE.

**Aback, To be taken,** to be astounded, taken by surprise. From the sailing-ship term *aback*, when the sails press against the mast and progress is suddenly stayed.

**Abacus** (âb'â kûs). The name given to a variety of counting devices first used by

the ancient civilizations of the Mediterranean and China (where it is called *Suan-Pan* and is still in use), but most commonly to the familiar nursery frame with its horizontal wires, each carrying ten sliding balls. The word is derived from a tablet covered in dust or sand (Gr. *abax*). The multiplication table invented by PYTHAGORAS is called *Abacus Pythagoricus*. *See* NAPIER'S BONES.

In architecture the *abacus* is the topmost member of a capital.

**Abaddon** (â bad'ôn). The angel of the bottomless pit (*Rev.* ix, 11), from Heb. *abad*, he perished. Milton used the name for the pit itself:

In all her gates Abaddon rues  
Thy bold attempt.

*Paradise Regained*, IV, 624.

**Abaris** (âb'â ris). **The dart of Abaris.** A mythical priest of APOLLO mentioned by Herodotus, PINDAR, etc. and surnamed "the Hyperborean". Apollo gave him a magic arrow which rendered him invisible and on which he rode through the air. He cured diseases and spoke oracles. Abaris gave the dart to PYTHAGORAS.

**Abatement** (O.Fr. *abatre*, to beat down). In HERALDRY, is a mark of dishonour of coat armour.

**Abaton** (âb'â ton) (Gr. *a*, not; *baino*, I go).

**As inaccessible as Abaton.** A name given to various places of antiquity difficult of access.

**Abbassides** (âb'â sidz). A dynasty of caliphs who ruled the Arabian Empire from 750 to 1258, descended from Abbas, uncle of MOHAMMED. Haroun al-Raschid (b. 765, reigned 786-808), of the ARABIAN NIGHTS, was one of their number.

**Abbot of Misrule.** *See* KING OF MISRULE.

**Abbot's Bromley Horn, or Antler Dance.** One of the rare European animal dances surviving from remote times. Originally danced on Twelfth Day at Abbot's Bromley, Staffordshire, it now takes place on the first Monday after 4 September. The six dancers, all male as in MORRIS DANCES, hold antlers (three of which are painted red and three white) to their heads as they dance. It may originally have been a form of fertility rite since the dancers go the round of neighbouring farms before the dance.

**A B C.** The alphabet. Hence "He doesn't know his A B C" means he is very ignorant: "he doesn't understand the



A B C of the subject" means that he has not grasped its rudiments. An *Absey Book* or *A B C Book* was a child's primer.

**Abd** in Arabic = slave or servant, as **ABDIEL** and **ABDALLAH** (*servant of God*), **Abd-el-Kader** (*servant of the Mighty One*), **Abdul-Latif** (*servant of the Gracious One*), etc.

**Abdallah** (āb dāl' ā). The father of **MOHAMMED**. He was so beautiful that when he married Amina 200 virgins broke their hearts from disappointed love. He died before his son was born. *See* Washington Irving's *Life of Mahomet*.

**Abdals** (āb' dālz). The name given by **MOSLEMS** to certain mysterious persons whose identity is known only to God and through whom the world is able to continue in existence. When one dies another is secretly appointed by God to fill the vacant place.

**Abdera** (āb dēr' ā). A maritime town of Thrace, mythically founded by **HERCULES** in memory of **ABDERUS**. The *Abderites* or *Abderitans* were proverbial for stupidity, said to be caused by the air, but among them were **DEMOCRITUS**, the laughing philosopher (hence *Abderitan laughter* = scoffing laughter, and *Abderite* = scoffer); **Protagoras**, the sophist; **Anaxarchos**, the philosopher friend of Alexander; and **Hecataeus**, the historian.

**Abderus**. A friend of **HERCULES**, who was devoured by the horses of **DIOMEDES** when keeping guard over them.

**Abdiel** (āb' dēl). *See* **ABD**. In Milton's *Paradise Lost* (V, 805, 896, etc.) the faithful seraph who withstood **SATAN** when he urged the angels to revolt.

**Abe, Old or Honest Abe**. Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States from 1861 to 1865.

**Abecedarian** (ā bē si dār' i ān). A teacher or learner of the A B C or rudiments. Also an **ANABAPTIST** sect, the **ZWICKAU PROPHETS**, founded in 1520. Led by Nicholas Stork, a weaver, they relied on direct inspiration from God, rejecting all learning as a hindrance.

**Abecedarian Hymns**. Hymns the lines or divisions of which begin with the letters of the alphabet in regular succession. In Hebrew the 119th Psalm is abecedarian. *See* **ACROSTIC POETRY**.

**Abelard and Héloïse** (āb' e lard, ā lō ēz'). Peter Abelard (1079-1142), eminent scholar, theologian and philosopher, studied under William of Champeaux and Anselm, and founded an internationally famous school of theology in Paris. At the age of thirty-six he became tutor to Héloïse, the beautiful and accomplished

seventeen-year-old niece of Canon Fulbert of Notre Dame. They fell in love, a son was born and they were secretly married, but Héloïse soon disavowed the marriage that she might not hinder Abelard's preferment. Fulbert, enraged at her husband's seeming connivance, caused him to be emasculated. Abelard entered the monastery of St. Denis. Héloïse became a nun. Abelard continued his highly controversial teaching and later founded another school near Nogent-sur-Seine called **PARACLETE**, which, after his departure to take charge of the Abbey of St. Gildas in Brittany, was given to a sisterhood under Héloïse. His stormy career ended in 1142 and Héloïse was laid by his side in 1164. Their remains were transferred from Paraclete and re-buried in the **PÈRE-LACHAISE** cemetery (Paris) in 1817.

**Abelites** (āb' e litz), **Abelians**, or **Abelionians**. A Christian sect of the 4th century living in North Africa, mentioned by St. Augustine. They married but remained virgin, as they affirmed Abel did, since no children of his are mentioned in the **SCRIPTURES**. Children were adopted to maintain the sect.

**Abenezra**. *See* **ADMIRABLE**.

**Abhorrrers**. *See* **PETITIONERS**.

**Abif**. *See* **HIRAM ABIF**.

**Abigail** (āb' i gāl). A lady's maid. Abigail (I Sam. xxv, 24-28) repeatedly called herself David's handmaid, hence the usage. Beaumont and Fletcher in *The Scornful Lady* called the "waiting gentlewoman" by this name, and it was used by Swift, Fielding and others. Probably the usage was popularized by the political notoriety of Abigail Hill (Mrs. Masham), waiting-woman to **QUEEN ANNE** and royal favourite.

**Abingdon Law**. *See* **CUPAR JUSTICE**.

**Abhidhamma** (āb id a' ma). The third pitaka of the three texts (**TRIPITAKA**) which together form the sacred canon of the Buddhists. In seven treatises it is essentially concerned with metaphysics.

**Abiogenesis** (Gr. *a*, without, *bios*, life + *genesis*), a term applied by T. H. Huxley in 1870 to the ancient theory that non-living matter could produce living. An example of such spontaneous generation is found in **VIRGIL's Georgics** (Bk. IV), when the shepherd **Aristæus**, son of **APOLLO** and **CYRENE**, having lost his bees through disease and famine, slew four bulls at his mother's orders. On the ninth morning bees poured forth from the decomposing cattle.